

EXTRA 38/99

Death Pen

USA (Texas) Charles RECTOR
Jeff DOUGHTIE
Robert WHITE
David Earl GIBBS

The relentless conveyor belt of death continues in Texas, with four more prisoners convicted of capital murder facing execution in the next month. Charles Rector, Jeff Doughtie, Robert White and David Gibbs are scheduled to be killed on 25 March, 25 March, 30 March and 13 April respectively.

On 15 April, two days after the last of these men is due to be put to death, a two-day international business conference - EUROTEx - begins in Texas, which aims to build relationships between European and Texan companies involved in information technology. The promotional material claims that "the two-day event will provide an opportunity to...showcase the State of Texas as a global high tech center."

Amnesty International believes that EUROTEx participants should be aware that Texas is also a global death penalty centre. Since 1982, 171 inmates have been taken from their cells in Ellis Unit 1, Huntsville, and killed by the "high-tech" method of lethal injection. Seven have been executed so far in 1999. Over 440 other prisoners are on death row in Texas, including another four men scheduled to die between 28 April and 19 May.

Amnesty International does not advocate boycotts or disinvestment, nor does it criticize companies engaged in legitimate business in any country. However, it believes that companies have a responsibility to use their influence to protect human rights. Companies should be aware of the human rights situation in countries they do business with.

Not only does Texas execute more prisoners than any other US state, more indeed than most *countries*, but it also does so with a sometimes appalling disregard for international minimum standards governing the death penalty. Texas continues to use the death penalty against juvenile offenders, in violation of international law which bans its use against those who were under 18 at the time of the crime. Some 24 inmates now on the state's death row were convicted of crimes committed when they were aged 17. Since 1990, Texas has executed five such prisoners, more than any other jurisdiction in the world, as far as Amnesty International knows. There are plans to lower the minimum age at which a defendant in Texas may face the death penalty to 16. Also in contravention of international standards, mentally ill and mentally retarded people have been sentenced to death and executed.

The European Commission and the European Union (EU) will be represented at EUROTEx. The June 1998 *Guidelines to EU Policy towards third countries on the death penalty* state that the EU's objective, "where possible, is to persuade third countries to abolish the death penalty...and [the EU] will raise the issue in multilateral fora...and encourage and offer bilateral and multilateral cooperation, inter alia in collaboration with civil society..." Also in 1998, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the death penalty which, among other measures, called on the European Commission and the Council of Europe to "promote the abolition of the death penalty through their relations with third countries..."

Amnesty International believes that the death penalty has no place in modern society, a fact reflected by its abolition in law or practice in more than half the world's countries. However, the USA - which claims to be the most progressive force for human rights in the world - has increased its use of the death penalty in recent years.

Those sentenced to death in the USA, including the four men named above, have been convicted of heinous crimes. However, by calling for them not to be killed, Amnesty International does not seek to excuse those crimes. Rather, it believes that every death sentence is an affront to human dignity, and that every execution, with its message that killing is an appropriate response to killing, compounds the violence in society.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

To Governor Bush:

- expressing sympathy for the victims of crime and their relatives;
- expressing deep concern at the continuing use of the death penalty in Texas, and urging that he commute the death sentences against Charles Rector, Jeff Doughtie, Robert White and David Gibbs and all other death sentences that come before him;
- urging that he play a leadership role in bringing about abolition in Texas and the USA.

To Sir Leon Brittan and Mr Hugo Paemen:

Copy them your appeal to Governor Bush, and in a covering letter to them:

- explain your concern over the use of the death penalty in Texas;
- noting the European Parliament resolution and European Union guidelines, and noting the addressees' presence at the EUROTEX meeting;
- urging Sir Leon Brittan and Ambassador Paemen to appeal to Governor Bush to commute the sentences of Charles Rector, Jeff Doughtie, Robert White and David Gibbs, and to stop all executions in Texas with a view to abolition;
- urging the addressees to bring to the attention of EUROTEX participants the worldwide concern about the death penalty in Texas, including its use against juvenile offenders and the mentally impaired.

APPEALS TO: (please limit appeals to 50 per Section)

The Honourable George Bush (addressing EUROTEX on 15 April).

PO Box 12428, Austin,
TX 78711, USA

Fax: +1 512 463 1849

Salutation: Dear Governor

Sir Leon BRITTAN (addressing EUROTEX on 15 April)

Vice President
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Bruxelles, Belgium

Fax: +32 2 295 0138; +32 2 295 0139

Salutation: Dear Sir Leon

Mr Hugo PAEMEN (addressing EUROTEX on 16 April)

Head of Delegation
Delegation of the European Union
2300 M Street, 3rd floor, NW
DC 20037 Washington, USA

Fax: +1 202 429 1766

Salutation: Dear Mr Paemen

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- Dallas Morning News, PO Box 655237, Dallas, TX 75265, USA

Fax: +1 972 263 0456. E-mail: letterstoeditor@dallasnews.com

- Houston Chronicle, 801 Texas Ave, Houston, TX 77002, USA.

Fax: +1 713 220 6677

and to diplomatic representatives of the USA accredited to your country.

You may also write letters to the editors of newspapers in your country, explaining this action and enclosing a copy of your appeal. Any coverage should be copied to Governor Bush and your UA Coordinator.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.