

**PUBLIC**

**AI Index: AMR 51/44/00**

**17 March 2000**

**Further information on EXTRA 11/00 (AMR 51/29/00, 21 February 2000) - Death penalty / Legal concern**

**USA (Virginia)                      Lonnie Weeks, Jr., black, aged 27**

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Lonnie Weeks was executed in Virginia on the evening of 16 March 2000. He was sentenced to death in October 1993 for the murder of State Trooper Jose Cavazos in 1993.

In his final statement before he was lethally injected, Lonnie Weeks said: "I want to say I'm sorry for everything I've done to the Cavazos family, to my family, to everybody around the world [he had been told of international appeals for clemency], and I just thank the Cavazos family for what they've tried to do for me, and I love them, and God bless them."

The son and daughter of Jose Cavazos had appealed for clemency, urging that Lonnie Weeks' two children not be made fatherless like they themselves had been (see original EXTRA). Lonnie Weeks had also expressed the hope that the Governor would spare his life: "I'm not asking to be set free. I should pay for what I did. I just don't want to die. I don't want to leave my kids."

For the past year, the Virginia authorities have refused to allow Jose Cavazos's children (now adults) to meet with Lonnie Weeks, fearing that such a meeting would become the focus for anti-death penalty protests. On 9 March 2000, however, the daughter was able to speak with Lonnie Weeks on the telephone for over an hour. Afterwards Leslie Cavazos-Almagia said that she hoped his life would be spared.

Amnesty International wrote to Governor Gilmore on 14 March, urging him not to allow the state of Virginia to make two more children fatherless, but instead to use his power to call a halt to the violence that has played such a terrible and tragic role in the lives of these two families.

In its letter, the organization also wrote: "Amnesty International believes that the evidence that the jury which sentenced Lonnie Weeks to death did so as a result of confusion, rather than informed intent, is overwhelming" (see original EXTRA). It cited the dissent by four US Supreme Court Justices on the case, affidavits from jurors at the Weeks trial, and an in-depth study of the Weeks case conducted in 1999 at Cornell University Law School which found that the trial jurors had in all likelihood been confused. The study involved the use of 154 mock jurors selected in Virginia.

Amnesty International's letter continued: "It is often said by those with the power of executive clemency that they would not wish to "second guess" the decisions of capital jurors. There is surely no need for such speculation in this case, however. The evidence, including from jurors themselves, offers more than a reasonable doubt that Lonnie Weeks would not have been sentenced to death if the trial judge had injected the clarity into the jurors' deliberations that they had requested. The power of executive clemency exists for a number of reasons. One of these reasons is to compensate for the rigidities of the capital justice system. This is one case which surely cries out for just such compensation."

Governor Gilmore denied clemency about two hours before the execution. His statement reportedly said: "Trooper Jose Cavazos died honorably in the performance of his duties while protecting the lives of the people of Virginia. Weeks admitted to police that he murdered Trooper Cavazos... Upon a thorough review of the Petition for Clemency, the numerous court decisions regarding this case, and the circumstances of this matter, I decline to intervene."

Lonnie Weeks becomes the 76<sup>th</sup> prisoner executed in Virginia since the state resumed judicial killing in 1982. He was also the 25<sup>th</sup> prisoner to be executed in the USA this year, and the fifth in 48 hours (the other four were carried out in Texas (2), Arizona and California).

This was the 623<sup>rd</sup> execution in the USA since the country resumed executions in 1977.

**No further action by the UA Network is requested. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.**