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Florida/Texas: US preparing to execute 50th prisoner of the year

The USA is preparing to execute its 50th prisoner of the year, Amnesty International said as Gary Graham waits to enter the Texas death chamber tonight.

"Not only is this a staggering figure, but it includes several executions carried out in clear contempt of international safeguards," the organization continued.

"Last night it was the execution of a severely mentally ill inmate in Florida. This evening it is set to be the lethal injection of a man convicted of a crime committed when he was a child."

Gary Graham, also known as Shaka Sankofa, is scheduled to be executed later today in Texas for a crime committed when he was 17. International law forbids the use of the death penalty against those who were under 18 at the time of the crime. The USA is virtually alone in carrying out such executions, accounting for 11 of the 16 known in the world since 1993.

"If tonight's execution of Gary Graham goes ahead in Texas, the USA's disregard for international standards of justice will be plain for all to see," Amnesty International said.

"The Texas authorities and the US federal government -- both of whom have an obligation to stop this internationally illegal execution -- should make no mistake. The world is watching."

Yesterday, in violation of international standards, Florida's executioners killed Thomas Provenzano, a man who -- even the courts agreed -- believed he was being punished because he was Jesus Christ.

Provenzano had come within 11 minutes of execution on Tuesday, already strapped down with the lethal injection needles in his body, when he won a reprieve from a federal court. Twenty-four hours later, with the stay lifted, he went through the same cruel, macabre ritual, this time for real.

"For Thomas Provenzano, death was preceded by what amounted to a mock execution, which constitutes a form of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment," Amnesty International said. "It is now the turn of Gary Graham to face imminent death at the hands of his government."

"While it is too late for Thomas Provenzano, in the case of Gary Graham the Texas and US leadership still has time to heed universal standards of justice and decency."

The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles is due to make its recommendation on Gary Graham to Governor George W. Bush Jr, at around midday local time, six hours before the scheduled execution.

"Gary Graham's execution will break almost every rule in the international standards handbook," continued Amnesty International. "No use of the death penalty against children; the guarantee of adequate legal representation at all stages of proceedings; prohibition of execution where the prisoner's guilt is in question -- his is a textbook example of the flawed nature of the US capital justice system."

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