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USA: Amnesty calls on Texas to halt “shameful” 500th execution

Amnesty International is calling on the US state of Texas to halt its 500th execution since the reinstatement of capital punishment in the United States of America in 1976. In what it describes as a “shameful milestone”, Kimberly McCarthy, is scheduled to be put to death by lethal injection in Huntsville at 6pm local time barring a stay of her execution.

The 52-year-old African American woman was sentenced to death in 2002 for murder.

“Capital punishment in Texas has been arbitrary, biased and prone to error,” said Brian Evans, director of Amnesty International USA’s campaign to abolish the death penalty. “It is a profound and irreversible injustice. The death penalty is cruel, inhuman and degrading, and a violation of the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” he said.

The list of the 499 people put to death in Texas since 1976 includes prisoners suffering from severe mental illness or intellectual disability, teenage offenders and defendants who had been provided with woefully inadequate counsel when on trial for their lives. In several cases, executions went ahead despite convictions based on flawed or questionable evidence

The lone star state of Texas has the deadly distinction of topping the US execution table, having carried out nearly 400 more executions than the second-highest offender, Virginia, with 110 since 1976. Although the number of executions in Texas is falling year on year, Brian Evans points to worrying trends.

“Amnesty International recognizes that attitudes may be shifting in Texas, as jury-issued death sentences in recent years have been at historic lows. However, among other things, there is reason to be concerned about the continuing influence of race in capital justice.”

Seven of the nine people sentenced to death in Texas in 2012 and six of the seven executions this year have been African Americans.

While only 12.2 per cent of the population of Texas is black, African American inmates make up nearly 40 per cent of the 283 inmates currently on death row in the state. In Harris County, African Americans account for more than 70 per cent of death row inmates, and less than 20 percent of the general population.

In 1997 Duane Buck was sentenced to death after a Harris County jury heard “expert” evidence that Buck was likely to pose a future danger of violent behaviour because of the colour of his skin.

“This alarming suggestion illustrates just one aspect of the acute injustice in the Texas capital punishment system. After more than 30 years and 499 executions, it is time for Texas to break old habits and join the trend towards abolition,” said Brian Evans.

According to Amnesty International’s [most recent yearly report on the use of the death penalty worldwide](#), the overall the worldwide trend is away from the use of the death penalty. Five US States have legislated to abolish the death penalty in the past six years – New Jersey (2007), New Mexico (2009), Illinois (2010), Connecticut (2012), and just last month, Maryland.

Note

You can find more information about the death penalty in Texas in the briefing [USA, a Deadly Distinction. 500th Execution in Texas](#).

