

URGENT ACTION

KENNETH WILLIAMS EXECUTED IN ARKANSAS

Kenneth Williams was executed in Arkansas on 27 April for a murder committed during a prison escape in 1999. He became the fourth prisoner to be put to death in Arkansas since 20 April after more than a decade without executions in that state.

In September 1999, **Kenneth Williams**, then 20 years old, was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole for a 1998 murder in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. On 3 October 1999, he escaped from prison. On the afternoon of the escape, Cecil Boren was shot dead at his home not far from the prison and his truck was taken. The truck was spotted the next day in Missouri and pursued by police. During the chase the driver of another truck, Michael Greenwood, was killed when the two trucks collided. Police arrested Kenneth Williams after he fled the scene on foot. He was tried and convicted in June 2000 of the capital murder of Cecil Boren. The jury voted for a death sentence.

Final appeals were unsuccessful. The execution, originally scheduled for 7pm on 27 April 2017, was delayed as the US Supreme Court considered whether to intervene. It declined to do so and the execution went ahead. Kenneth Williams was pronounced dead at 11.05pm, about 13 minutes after the lethal injection began and just under an hour before the death warrant was due to expire.

Kenneth Williams was the fourth prisoner to be put to death in Arkansas since 20 April, out of eight originally scheduled for execution in an 11-day period beginning on 17 April. The other four received stays of execution.

Governor Asa Hutchinson issued a statement after the execution of Kenneth Williams, asserting that “The long path of justice ended tonight and Arkansans can reflect on the last two weeks with confidence that our system of laws in this state has worked. Carrying out the penalty of the jury in the Kenneth Williams case was necessary. There has never been a question of guilt.” He said that “in the last seven days, after decades of waiting”, the families of the murder victims in the cases of those executed “were finally provided the justice they were promised and they also saw that our system of laws have meaning.”

The four executions in Arkansas come a matter of months after the USA recorded its lowest annual execution total for 25 years, and as death sentencing in the USA continues to decline. Today 141 countries are abolitionist in law or practice.

There have been 10 executions in the USA in 2017, bringing the total to 1,452 since judicial killing resumed in the USA in 1977 under capital statutes approved by the US Supreme Court in 1976. The four executions in Arkansas – its first since 2005 – bring the number carried out in that state to 31 since 1977. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all countries and all cases, unconditionally.

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

This is the first update of UA 78/17. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/6009/2017/en/

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