

URGENT ACTION

WILLIAM MORVA EXECUTED IN VIRGINIA

William Morva, a 35-year-old US-Hungarian national who had been diagnosed with delusional disorder, was executed in Virginia on 6 July. Among those who appealed for clemency was the daughter of one of his victims and two United Nations experts.

William Morva was sentenced to death in 2008 for the murder of a hospital security guard, Derrick McFarland, and Sheriff's Deputy Corporal Eric Sutphin, during an escape from custody. In 2012, a psychologist reviewed all available materials, including William Morva's family history of "extensive and severe mental illness" which included diagnoses of delusional disorder, schizophrenia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. The psychologist was critical of expert assessments conducted for the trial, concluding that none had identified or detailed the mitigating impact of, among other things, William Morva's persistent "somatic, paranoid, and grandiose delusions", and a "clear history of psychiatric deterioration" prior to the crime. He concluded that William Morva's somatic delusions in particular "may have formed a nexus with the crimes in that he apparently believed he was dying because of his 'ailments' – seemingly motivating his escape attempt." In 2014, a court-appointed psychiatrist conducted an evaluation, and diagnosed William Morva as having delusional disorder, persecutory type. She opined that he committed his crimes as a result of the delusions he was experiencing.

Among those who called on the Governor to grant clemency was Eric Sutphin's daughter, numerous Virginia legislators, and the UN Special Rapporteurs on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the right to health. On 29 June, Amnesty International and others delivered to the Governor a petition signed by more than 34,000 people calling for clemency.

In a statement issued on 6 July denying clemency, Governor Terry McAuliffe said that he and his staff had reviewed "extensive communications from family members of the victims, law enforcement officials, community leaders, and concerned observers from all over the world", but that he had not found "sufficient cause in Mr. Morva's petition or case records to justify overturning the will of the jury that convicted and sentenced him." The Governor said that while he personally opposes the death penalty, "I took an oath to uphold the laws of this Commonwealth regardless of my personal views of those laws, as long as they are being fairly and justly applied. Thus, after extensive review and deliberation consistent with the process I have applied to previous requests for commutation, I have declined Mr. Morva's petition. I have and will continue to pray for the families of the victims of these terrible crimes and for all of the people whose lives have been impacted."

The execution went ahead at 9pm as scheduled, and William Morva was pronounced dead at 9.15pm. He declined to make a final statement.

There have been 14 executions in the USA this year, bringing the total to 1,456 since judicial killing resumed in 1977 under new capital statutes approved by the US Supreme Court in 1976. Virginia accounts for 113 of these executions. This was the second execution in Virginia this year.

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

This is the first update of UA 134/17. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/6464/2017/en/

Further information on UA: 134/17 Index: AMR 51/6683/2017 Issue Date: 7 July 2017

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