

Death Penalty Concerns Highlighted in Davis Stay Petition

Religious leaders across the country are calling on their peers to help stop the execution of a man on Georgia's death row whose case has garnered worldwide attention, saying he should be granted clemency because of the widespread doubts about his guilt.

Amnesty International and People of Faith Against the Death Penalty are working with religious leaders to encourage others from all faith traditions to endorse a public letter urging the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles to commute the death sentence of Troy Davis. More than 1,500 leaders from all 50 states and the District of Columbia have already endorsed the letter. These include leaders of many different faith traditions, including Baptist, Methodist and Catholic clergy.

"This is a matter of conscience and it is urgent," says Stephen Dear, executive director of People of Faith Against the Death Penalty, a national advocacy group based in North Carolina. "We call on religious leaders, regardless of their position on the death penalty, to use their moral authority to help stop the execution of a man with a strong case of innocence."

Davis was convicted and sent to death row for the murder of Georgia police officer Mark Allen MacPhail in 1991. Seven of the nine original witnesses have since recanted or changed their testimonies and no physical evidence links Davis to the crime.

"This case, which is so plagued by doubts, puts into sharp contrast critical moral questions about the death penalty that clearly are capturing the attention of people of faith," says

Laura Moya, director of Amnesty International USA's Death Penalty Abolition Campaign in Washington. "From speaking from their own pulpits to praying at community rallies and delivering letters to Georgia authorities, religious leaders have been at the forefront of the campaign to prevent Davis' execution. We are pleased to see the support growing."

In March the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear Davis's appeals and set the stage for him to possibly face a fourth execution date at any time. Only the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles can stop his execution now.

Davis' case does not meet the standards of guilt held by the few religious organizations that formally support capital punishment, Dear said. For example, he said, the Southern Baptist Convention's most recent resolution on capital punishment cites the Book of Deuteronomy in requiring clear and overwhelming evidence of guilt.

"That's nowhere to be found in the Troy Davis case," Dear says.

More than half a million people worldwide have signed petitions for clemency for Davis.

"If our faith is to stand for anything let it stand for life in the face of doubt," Dear says. "Faith leaders speak out now."

Religious leaders can read and endorse the letter on Troy Davis at .

What are your thoughts on the death penalty?