

Tuesday, June 26. 2007

More set for execution in Iraq by hanging and in the U.S. by injection.

Death penalty: Always unjust. Iraq's government mimics Saddam Hussein's all too much in the capital punishment department, particularly in the swiftness of appellate rubber stamps and the swiftness of the execution thereafter. Today's Iraq continues Saddam Hussein's practice of hanging as the preferred execution method, with three high-level Hussein officials having received death sentences recently. Last January, Hussein's half brother was decapitated when hanged. Last March, Saddam Hussein's former vice president -- Taha Yassin Ramadan -- was hanged even though his trial court ordered a life sentence. The appellate judges who reviewed the case ordered a resentencing, saying the original sentence was too lenient, and he was swiftly hanged thereafter. Iraq can always try to deflect attention to its barbaric death penalty machine by looking eastward to China. For instance, here is a snippet of Congressional testimony by the Bush Administration -- far from a human rights stalwart -- about China's completely barbaric death penalty and organ harvesting practices: "The Department of State is also aware of reports that it cannot independently confirm, of other, even more egregious practices, such as removing organs from still-living prisoners, and scheduling executions to accommodate the need for particular organs. In addition, there are compelling first-hand reports that doctors, in violation of medical ethics codes, have performed medical procedures to prepare condemned prisoners for execution and organ removal. As former Assistant Secretary John Shattuck testified before this committee in 1998, our concern about the abhorrent practice of removing organs from executed prisoners without consent is compounded by our concerns about the lack of due process. According to Amnesty International there were 1,263 confirmed executions in 1999; according to another report 800 prisoners were executed in May 2001 alone as the government conducted another "strike hard" campaign against crime. A high court nominally reviews all death sentences, but as our Country Report on Human Rights Practices points out, and as a recent New York Times article graphically described, the time between arrest and execution is often days or even hours. Some prisoners are taken directly from the courtroom to the execution grounds. Appeals of sentences consistently result in confirmation of sentence." Last year, Stephen Wigmore of the British Transplantation Society said that: "The weight of evidence has accumulated to a point over the last few months where it's really incontrovertible in our opinion" that China continued to harvest the organs of executed people. The United States continues to be the only Western industrialized nation to execute people. Three executions are scheduled today, alone, in Texas, Oklahoma, and Georgia. These three people and the three above-listed condemned former Hussein officials were convicted of committing heinous murderous acts. To the extent they committed such horrendous crimes, their crimes should not be minimized. However, when people are sentenced to death, the focus gets shifted away from the defendant's criminal actions to the utter injustice and brutality of the death penalty, which amounts to state-sanctioned murder. Texas continues taking the lead for executions, taking credit for all but one of June's executions thus far, as follows: June 6 Michael Griffith (Texas); 15 Michael Lambert (Indiana); 20 Lionell Rodriguez (Texas); 21 Gilberto Reyes (Texas); and 22 Calvin Shuler (S.C.). As much as I did not want to live in Washington, DC, so as not to suffer no voting representation on Capitol Hill, at least D.C. is one of the jurisdictions that has no state-level death penalty. For those considering moving to non-death penalty states, they are: Alaska, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia. Please patronize these states (and D.C.) for your vacation, business, and residential needs, to send sales tax dollars their way in appreciation for their refusal to adopt capital punishment. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Criminal Defense at 01:15