

PUBLIC

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Death Penalty

1 November 2001

BELIZE

Michael Anthony Hendrix ("Steven Smith")

Michael Anthony Hendrix, also known as Steven Smith, was sentenced to death on 25 October. If his execution is carried out, it would be the first in Belize since 1985.

Hendrix was found guilty of the July 2000 murder of 22-year-old Richard Cattouse. He is currently held in Hattieville Prison. Hendrix is in his mid-twenties (24 or 26 according to press reports) and is the father of two children.

His lawyers are reportedly planning to appeal. If the appeal court ratifies the sentence, his lawyers could submit a final appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, based in London.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Death by hanging is mandatory for murder in Belize, except where extenuating circumstances can be proved. The prerogative of mercy lies with the Governor General, who is advised by the 10-person Belize Advisory Council. The last execution was carried out in June 1985, when Kent Bowers was hanged despite a petition for clemency reportedly signed by 2,500 people. Since 1985 numerous death sentences have been handed down, though none have been carried out.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- acknowledging that Michael Anthony Hendrix was convicted of a very serious crime, and expressing sympathy for the family and friends of Richard Cattouse;
- welcoming the fact that no executions have been carried out in Belize for more than 15 years, and stressing that the resumption of executions would be a retrograde step in the protection of human rights for all Belize's citizens;
- calling for clemency and urging that Michael Anthony Hendrix's death sentence be commuted in the name of compassion and human rights, pointing out that the death penalty has never been shown to deter crime more effectively than other punishments;
- expressing unconditional opposition to the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment;
- urging that all other pending death sentences be commuted and that no further sentences be passed.

If possible please also:

- state that executions are becoming increasingly rare around the world, with most countries having abandoned the death penalty;
- note that only a few nations, for example the USA, Iran, Iraq and Trinidad and Tobago are increasing their use of the death penalty or have high numbers of executions;
- point out that extensive research has shown that the death penalty is used predominately against the poor, ethnic minorities and disadvantaged groups, particularly in the USA.

APPEALS TO:

Governor-General:

H. E. Sir. Colville Young
Office of the Governor-General
Belize House
Belmopan, BELIZE
Fax: + 501 8 22050
Salutation: Your Excellency

Prime Minister

Rt. Hon. Said Musa
Office of the Prime Minister
New Administrative Bldg
Belmopan, BELIZE
Fax: + 501 8 20071
e-mail: access@btl.net (mark for the attention of the Prime Minister)
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Attorney General and Minister of Information:

Mr. Godfrey Smith
Attorney General's Chambers
c/o Prime Minister's Office
New Administration Building
Belmopan, BELIZE
Fax: + 501 8 20071
Salutation: Dear Attorney General

COPIES TO:

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Belmopan, Belize
Tel/fax: + 501 8 22779

and to diplomatic representatives of Belize accredited to your country.

You may also write to:

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PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after