

# Georgia Moratorium Campaign

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## **Media Advisory For Immediate Release**

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### **Legislators, Religious and Human Rights Leaders will Speak Out for Justice in Georgia's Death Penalty**

**Atlanta--** A coalition of religious and human rights leaders will hold a **press conference** on **Tuesday, February 26, 2008 at 12:00 p.m. inside the State Capitol rotunda** to call on lawmakers to address threats to fairness and due process in the state's capital punishment system.

Speakers will include *Shareef Cousin*, a death row exoneree, *Martina Correia*, sister of Georgia death row inmate Troy Davis, who has raised a case for innocence, *Rep. Stephanie Stuckey Benfield*, sponsor of an eyewitness identification bill, and *Sen. Vincent Fort*, sponsor of a death penalty moratorium bill.

"In the face of a broken death penalty, it is urgent that legislators stop weakening the system, freeze executions and start to examine the many ways fairness and accuracy can be enhanced in a system that takes human life," said Laura Moye, of Amnesty International's Southern Regional Office in Atlanta.

#### **Georgia citizens are calling for...**

-Adequate funds for the legal defense of poor persons facing the death penalty.

- The Senate Appropriations Committee slashed the budget for the state's public defenders to \$513,000, despite Governor Sonny Perdue's approval of the requested \$3.6 million.

-Adequate standards for gathering accurate eyewitness identifications by law enforcement.

- Since 1989, DNA evidence has been used to exonerate over 200 individuals (including 6 in Georgia). About 75% were convicted due to inaccurate eyewitness identifications.

-A moratorium and study of the wide-ranging, well-documented problems with capital punishment.

- A team of Georgia legal experts, sponsored by the American Bar Association, overwhelmingly recommended a moratorium on executions its Jan. 2006 report. Problems cited included: inadequate funding for indigent defense, failure to guarantee defense counsel in state habeas proceedings, lack of meaningful review of proportionality of sentences, inadequate pattern jury instructions addressing mitigating evidence, and continued racial disparities in capital sentencing.
- The Atlanta Journal Constitution 4-part series, "A Matter of Life or Death," (Sept. 2007) details problems with socio-economic bias, disproportionate and arbitrary sentencing.
- The Liebman Study, "A Broken System," (Oct. 2002) details high error rates in capital sentencing and shows Georgia to be above the national average in reversing cases.

#### **Citizens will lobby their legislators before the press conference to support:**

- *Full funding of the indigent defense system*
- *Eyewitness ID reform, including passage of the Witness Identification Accuracy Enhancement Act (HB 997) and best practices for conducting identification procedures (HR 1071)*
- *A time-out on executions to allow the state to study and address systematic problems with the state's capital punishment system (SR 364, SB255)*

**Participants:** the American Civil Liberties Union, Amnesty International, Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda, NAACP, Southern Center for Human Rights, Catholic Archdiocese, Episcopal Diocese, Atlanta Presbytery, Congregation Bet Haverim, Masjid El-Muminun and other religious congregations.

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