

United States: Planned execution of seriously ill man may amount to torture, warn UN experts

Two United Nations human rights experts have urged the Government of the United States to halt the execution of a seriously ill person stressing that given his health condition, the use of lethal injection could possibly amount to torture.

In a [news release](#), Agnes Callamard, the UN [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#); and Nils Melzer, the UN [Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment](#), also expressed concern that Doyle Hamm, who is due to be executed in the state of Alabama on 22 February, may not have received a fair trial.

The execution is set to go ahead even though Mr. Hamm has cancer and medical professionals have previously had difficulty accessing his veins, the release added.

“We are seriously concerned that attempts to insert needles into Mr. Hamm’s veins to carry out the lethal injection would inflict pain and suffering that may amount to torture,” said the UN rights experts.

The release also noted that judges have ordered a fresh medical report to be delivered by 20 February, two days before the scheduled execution.

“We urge the authorities to halt [Mr. Hamm’s] execution, annul his death sentence, and hold a re-trial that complies with international standards, as we have received information indicating that his original trial did not fully respect the most stringent due process and fair trial guarantees,” they added.

The Special Rapporteurs also said that the planned method of execution, using Alabama’s “three-drug protocol,” may also have torturous effects, because the sedative used is incapable of keeping a convict unconscious in the presence of the “excruciating pain” likely to be induced by the other drugs.

Further, Ms. Callamard and Mr. Melzer said that imposing the death penalty in a manner that constitutes torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment would render the execution arbitrary in nature and thus be in violation of the fundamental right to life.

The news release also noted that the human rights experts have written to the US Government to express their concerns about the case.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or

a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.