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Death penalty abolitionists gathering in Atlanta

Patrick O'Neill | Nov. 9, 2010

For the first time in more than decade, faith-based anti-death penalty activists will gather for a national conference in the heart of the South. The conference is sponsored by the North Carolina-based abolition group, People of Faith Against the Death Penalty.

"The Kairos Conference: Discerning Justice & Taking Action on America?s Death Penalty [1]" runs Nov. 16-17 at Atlanta's Emory University, in the region of the country where the death penalty has always garnered the most popular support.

The southern states, if you include Texas, account for more than 90 percent of the 1,233 US executions carried out since 1977. In May, Georgia carried out the state's 998 execution since records have been maintained.

People of Faith executive director Stephen Dear says the time is right for faith-based activists to work toward abolition. In recent years, three states have abolished their death penalty statutes and eight more are considering abolition, Dear said.

In addition, nationally 139 people have been freed from death rows after new evidence was discovered, leaving many Americans skeptical about the fairness of capital punishment, said Sr. Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking*, who is the honorary chair of the conference and a keynote speaker.

Other conference speakers, include clergy, theologians, attorneys and anti-death penalty activists, such as: Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, the Rev. Billy Neal Moore, a former Georgia death row prisoner whose case drew worldwide attention, Bud Welch, whose daughter was killed in the Oklahoma City bombing, and Prof. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, a scholar on human rights and ethics at Emory.

The conference will include a press conference at Ebenezer Baptist Church, where the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was co-pastor with his father.

For more details, visit the conference web site: **www.kairosconference.org** [1]

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[1] http://www.kairosconference.org/