



MINISTRY
AGAINST THE
DEATH
PENALTY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 14, 2020

**Statement from Sister Helen Prejean on the Federal Government's
Execution of Daniel Lee**

The federal government's conduct over the past few days has been immoral, unethical, and lacking any human decency. We must hold these public officials to account for their actions.

When Attorney General Barr announced these Federal execution dates, he justified the state-sponsored killing by saying that we "owe it to the victims, and to the families left behind." That justification was dead on arrival.

Daniel Lee's crime was despicable, but family members of the three people murdered by Lee were resolutely *opposed* to the planned execution, and had made their wishes clear almost a year before the announced execution. Nevertheless, they felt they should witness the execution if it were to go forward. But when the Department of Justice decided to proceed with the executions during the coronavirus pandemic, the victims' family members sued the government because there was no safe way to attend the execution. The Department of Justice, supposedly "on the side" of victims' families, responded that victims' families have no right to attend the execution of a person involved in the killing of their loved ones.

Yesterday was non-stop legal wrangling over the planned execution. Everything seemed to be settled when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit entered an order around midnight that blocked the execution. Many of us went to sleep relieved to think that the government would not kill in our names that night. Then, around 2 am, the U.S. Supreme Court issued an opinion that granted the government permission to proceed with the execution. The five justices that allowed this to happen didn't have the courage to sign their names to their decision, but we know who they are: Chief Justice Roberts, Justice Thomas, Justice Alito, Justice Gorsuch, and Justice Kavanaugh. Justices Breyer, Ginsburg, Sotomayor, and Kagan signed forceful dissents.

With the Supreme Court's imprimatur in hand, the government attempted to execute Daniel Lee under the cloak of darkness at 4 am. They were informed that a lower court order remained in place blocking the execution. The government left Lee strapped to the gurney in the execution chamber for four hours while the DOJ worked overtime to overturn the lower court order. The execution was finally carried out around 8 am this morning.

Legal experts believe this execution may have been in violation of federal law because the execution warrant expired at midnight and it appears that the government did not seek a renewed warrant.

There are so many unanswered questions about the government's shameful conduct. Attorney General Barr and every other government actor involved in

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this travesty must be held to account for their actions. I am calling on Congress to launch an investigation and hold public hearings. The American people deserve to know the truth about this lawless execution.

Sister Helen Prejean is known around the world for her tireless work against the death penalty and her bestselling book Dead Man Walking. Her organization, the Ministry Against the Death Penalty, is based in New Orleans but its reach is both national and international.

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