

tions. In many states, education, health and human services, and public transportation budgets remain stagnant or decline while more and more prisons are built. For some small towns facing losses in agriculture, mining, or manufacturing, the economic benefits from building a prison and offering related services are seen as economic development creating vital new jobs. Rural communities may not have the social or physical infrastructure to handle either the facility itself, the needs of the inmate's family, or the needs of the staff. But public debate rarely encourages serious dialogue about the costs of incarceration versus less costly alternatives, such as prevention, education, community efforts, and drug treatment." They also point to the disproportionate numbers of minorities in America's prisons and death rows.

Specifically, the bishops reject the growing trend of treating juvenile offenders as adults "fully formed in conscience"; they urge that former felons be given the right to vote; and express their "skepticism" about for-profit private prisons. They call for more drug treatment programs for prisoners, guaranteed access to religious programs in the prisons, and "those necessities that enable inmates to live in dignity: food, clothing, shelter, personal safety, timely medical care, education, and meaningful work adequate to the conditions of human dignity."

The statement also calls for "restorative justice" for victims of crime, who sometimes are " 'used' by the criminal justice system or political interests. As the prosecution builds a case, the victim's hurt and loss can be seen as a tool to obtain convictions and tough sentences. But the victim's need to be heard and to be healed are not really addressed."

In this time of intense political and religious division in the nation, this statement is a most welcome one, with its emphasis on "subsidiarity and solidarity"—that "we are all really responsible for all"—and on alternatives to killing and prisons that "do not simply punish, but rehabilitate, heal, and restore." It reminds one of Lyndon and Helga LaRouche's recent repeated calls for a return to the principles of the Treaty of Westphalia, that forgiveness is the basis for continuing civilization.

### **Moratorium on Federal Death Penalty**

The open letter to President Clinton by the Citizens for a Moratorium on Federal Executions, tells the President, "Unless you take action, executions will begin at a time when your own Attorney General has expressed concern about racial and other disparities in the Federal death penalty process. Such a result would be an intolerable affront to the goals of justice and equality for which you have worked during your Presidency. Consequently, we urge you to put in place a moratorium until the Department of Justice completes its review of the Federal death penalty process."

The CMFE letter notes that that Department of Justice report, released in September, found that, among all the Federal capital defendants against whom the Attorney General

has authorized seeking the death penalty, 69% have been Hispanic and African-American (18% and 51%, respectively), while only 25% have been white. On Federal death row itself, as of the time of the DOJ's survey, 17 of the 21 persons—81%—were racial or ethnic minorities.

That Department of Justice survey also found inexplicable geographic disparities in the administration of the Federal death penalty. In 16 states, prosecutors seek and obtain death penalty authorization in at least 50% of the Federal capital cases that are submitted for review by the Attorney General. On the other hand, there are eight states in which that rate is much lower, ranging from 8% to 30%. And there are 21 states in which U.S. Attorneys have either never requested or never obtained authorization to seek the death penalty.

George W. Bush's state of Texas has the highest death penalty authorization rate in the nation (as well as the highest execution rate). Juan Garza, whose life the CMFE letter seeks to spare, is an Hispanic from Texas—the probable victim of both ethnic and geographic discrimination.

The open letter to President Clinton emphasizes that "no Federal death sentence can be carried out until the studies and the 'honest dialogue' that must follow from them have been completed. . . . We cannot bring Mr. Garza or others back if we decide that they were the victims of a death penalty system distorted by bias and arbitrariness."

In the interview which follows, CMFE spokesperson Angela Oh expresses optimism that President Clinton will listen to this plea, and that he, like many Americans, has been changed by the findings of this report and others like it over the past several years. Were he to do so, it would be a lasting contribution to America in the beginning of the new millennium.

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### **Interview: Angela E. Oh**

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## **For a Moratorium on Federal Death Penalty**

*Angela E. Oh, a California attorney, is a signer on the Nov. 21 Open Letter to President Clinton from the Citizens for a Moratorium on Federal Executions. She is a member of the Advisory Board One America: The President's Initiative on Race, and former president of the Korean-American Bar Association of Southern California. She spoke with Marianna Wertz on Nov. 27.*

**EIR:** I wanted to ask you, as a member of the Advisory Board One America, President Clinton's advisory board on race is-



*Angela E. Oh is a signer of the open letter to President Clinton by Citizens for a Moratorium on Federal Executions.*

sues, whether you think this appeal for a moratorium on use of the death penalty at the Federal level will have an effect on the President in the direction that you asked for?

**Oh:** I don't know that my simply having served on the advisory board is of any value there, although we did look at the administration of justice, and specifically at some of the issues, and research, that go to the kind of disparities that we're raising in this letter on the moratorium. But my hope is that, because those of us who have signed onto this letter, are individuals whom the President has had an opportunity to work with—he knows that we are individuals who are very thoughtful and committed to this notion of equality in all of the forms that we accomplish that or achieve that—that he will look at this letter and look at some of the data that his own administration has examined and raised some concerns about. [Attorney General] Janet Reno has raised concerns about the death penalty, given the research that has come out recently, about disparities tied to regional differences as well as race.

**EIR:** That's right, we covered that report [see *New Federalist*, Sept. 25, 2000].

**Oh:** We tried to remind him of the fact that we're not just coming from a place of, "Gee, we don't like the death penalty." We really are looking at it based on some of the information that has now surfaced in connection with the administration of justice.

**EIR:** I've watched this President move from when he was first seeking election and went to Arkansas, where he was then Governor, to oversee the execution of Ricky Rector, to the point today that he has looked seriously at the need for a moratorium. You know him better than I do; what do you think is moving him in that direction?

**Oh:** I think there's a certain amount of new information that has come to light, that has been made available to everyone now who is involved in the criminal justice system, and also

certainly to people who are not, but are interested in looking at the administration of justice. The new information raises very troubling kinds of concerns.

The other thing is, for him individually, a lot happens in a person's lifetime. You're talking about a spread of literally a decade there, in that one example you give me, and I would certainly hope that I'm a different and better person today than I was ten years ago, in terms of discrete issues like the death penalty, having now learned more about it, having had more experience in the criminal justice system myself, as a practitioner, and also just having been more thoughtful about where public policy takes us, and leadership takes us, as a society.

**EIR:** How did you get involved in the President's Initiative on Race?

**Oh:** I think he heard me as a voice of reconciliation after the '92 implosion in Los Angeles. We had several thousand small, family-owned businesses, mostly immigrant, lots of property damage done. It was often attributed to tensions between blacks and Koreans. I really didn't buy that, when I started hearing that on the media. I was somebody who was very active in Los Angeles anyway at a grassroots level, in the legal community, as well as in the immigrant Korean community.

At the time, I was the president-elect of the Korean-American Bar Association of Southern California, and I was also the president of a women's organization called WORK (Women's Organization Reaching Koreans). When the press came to me, my analysis of the reason why Los Angeles went into flames and into that five-day period of looting and vandalism and arson, was because we had had double-digit unemployment for a number of years. We were in a recession at that point. Nobody was saying it, but we were, in the early 1990s.

**EIR:** We were saying it.

**Oh:** Yes. That was the other "r" word nobody wanted to say. We had very poor police-community relations. We had a situation where the investment into the infrastructure was going into Bunker Hill, which is the financial district, and not into South Central, which is five miles south of Bunker Hill. We had a huge shift occurring in our city and county, a demographic shift, in which there were a number of small tensions that were breaking out into local conflicts, and nobody was really paying much attention to that. Grassroots organizations were starting things like the Black-Korean Alliance, but there was no leadership on the part of the political leaders, to deal with that.

So, in a very short amount of time that I was given on the Ted Koppel Show, I sort of encapsulated all of this, and I think at that time, Clinton was building his candidacy for the Presidency and he heard me. I think my name just surfaced to him in a number of different ways.