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## **SISTER HELEN PREJEAN CALLS FOR RECALL OF DRUG UNAPPROVED FOR USE IN EXECUTIONS**

Acclaimed author and three-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee Sister Helen Prejean has called upon one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world to comply with its own Code of Ethics and recall its sale of an epilepsy medication to the Georgia Department of Corrections, which plans to use it to execute prisoners by lethal injection, starting this Thursday evening.

In a letter to the Board of Directors of CardinalHealth, an Ohio-based healthcare services company, Sister Prejean detailed CardinalHealth's sale of thirty packages of the sedative Nembutal, or pentobarbital, to Georgia's death row for over \$27,000. "This sale," as Sister Prejean informed the Board, "was not for the purpose of 'improving people's lives' as you say on your website, but to kill . . . persons sentenced to death."

While the drug is approved for use in treating seizures and pre-operative sedation, its manufacturer, the Danish company Lundbeck A/S, has objected to Nembutal's "misuse" in lethal injections and has written to several states – including Georgia – that it cannot assure the safety or efficacy of Nembutal when used in executions. Georgia plans to use the drug to render the prisoner unconscious before the administration of a paralytic and then a third drug, which causes cardiac arrest. "This is a critical concern," Sister Prejean wrote. "Were the prisoner to regain consciousness during the administration of the potassium chloride, he would suffer terrible agony, but would be unable to alert observers to his suffering because of the paralysis induced by the pancuronium bromide."

Cardinal Health's Standards of Business Practices acknowledge that "[w]e provide products and services that have the potential to save, *or if misused, to harm lives*" . . . and admonishes its employees to "determine whether [customers] *and their purchases* meet our standards." Sister Prejean concluded that "[t]hese stated concerns . . . cannot be reconciled in this situation, particularly given that the supplier of the drug has been expressly warned that the customer in this case affirmatively intends to misuse this drug in lethal executions."

CardinalHealth is a publicly-traded healthcare services company based in Dublin, Ohio, and ranks 19th on the Fortune 500 list with 2010 revenues of nearly \$99 billion. Sister Prejean has urged Cardinal Health to demand the immediate return of the drugs and to refund the purchase price, which constitutes only 0.1% of Cardinal Health's first quarter revenues of \$27,000,000.

Georgia's bought the Nembutal after the Drug Enforcement Administration's seizure its supply of sodium thiopental, the drug it formerly used to render prisoners unconscious during lethal injection. The DEA seizure came amid concerns that Georgia violated federal law by importing thiopental directly from a foreign source without being licensed to do so, and failed to declare its importation.

A Catholic nun with the Congregation of St. Joseph, Sister Prejean is a renowned activist for social justice. Her memoir of her service as spiritual advisor to two prisoners on Louisiana's death row, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1993. An international best seller, her book has been translated into ten different languages and was made into both an Academy-Award winning motion picture and an acclaimed opera.

Georgia has scheduled the execution of Roy Willard Blankenship for 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 23, 2011. Sister Prejean wrote to CardinalHealth on behalf of Andrew Grant DeYoung, another Georgia death row prisoner.

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