

In final moments before execution, Texas inmate finds forgiveness

by [Story Hinckley](#)

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([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) Juan Martin Garcia was executed Tuesday for a fatal shooting and the robbery of \$8.

Garcia was pronounced dead from lethal injection at 6:26 p.m. in Huntsville, Texas, for the September 1998 killing of 36-year-old Hugo Solano. Solano had recently moved to Houston, Texas, from Guadalajara, Mexico, so his children could be educated in the United States.

Garcia apologized to Solano's wife, Ana, and his daughter who were present at the execution.

"The harm that I did to your dad and husband—I hope this brings you closure," he said in Spanish from the death chamber gurney, according to the Associated Press. "I never wanted to hurt any of you all."

Solano's relatives sobbed from the death chamber witness room and told Garcia that they loved him. After the execution, Ana Solano said she wished the execution had not taken place because she accepted Garcia's apology. It came "from his heart," Solano told AP. "It's about God. It's about Jesus."

Solano had testified at the penalty phase of Garcia's trial, saying she did not support a death sentence. The widow said Garcia deserved to live so he could share the lessons from his mistakes with others in similar situations.

Garcia, who was 18 at the time of Solano's shooting, already had a history with law enforcement. He was linked to at least eight aggravated robberies and two attempted murders only in the few weeks before.

In a jailhouse interview with AP last month, Garcia seemed to accept his fate. "If it's God's will, it's his will," Garcia said.

Eleazar Mendoza testified that Garcia, a street gang member, approached Solano as he was getting in his van to go to work, asked for his money at gunpoint, and then shot him when he refused. Mendoza was sentenced to 55 years in prison for aggravated robbery.

Garcia, Mendoza, and two other accomplices had already carried out a carjacking when they spotted Solano on September 17, 1998.

Garcia claims that Solano, who was shot four times in the head and neck, was killed accidentally while the two struggled over Garcia's gun. "He punches me," Garcia said from death row. "First thing that came through my mind is that the dude is going to try to kill me. He grabbed the gun with both of his hands and it discharged."

Garcia denied the robbery of \$8, an accompanying felony that made the murder a capital case. Garcia claimed jurors unfairly penalized him because he didn't take the witness stand in his own defense trial.

The U.S. Supreme Court refused to review Garcia's case in March and the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles rejected a clemency request in a five to two vote last Friday.

Texas typically carries out the death penalty more than any other state. Garcia was the 11th person to be executed in Texas this year, meaning that the state has already carried more executions this year than any other single state within the past ten years. The Lone Star state has three more executions scheduled for 2015.

This report contains material from the Associated Press.