

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **USA: Supreme Court outlaws execution of child offenders**

Today's decision by the US Supreme Court outlawing the execution of child offenders -- those who were under 18 at the time of the crime -- finally brings the USA into line with an unequivocal principle of international law, Amnesty International said today, welcoming the ruling.

"This landmark decision comes at a time when there is an urgent need for the USA to show that it will comply with international human rights standards," Amnesty International said. "Its good example will also help bring about final and total eradication of this internationally illegal practice worldwide."

In *Roper v. Simmons*, the Supreme Court found that executing child offenders violates the US Constitution, concluding that a national consensus against such executions had evolved since 1989 when it ruled that the execution of 16- and 17-year-old offenders was constitutional. The Court had considered national and international trends, scientific evidence, and appeals from religious, human rights, legal and child advocacy organizations.

"The fact that the world's main perpetrator of this international law violation has now ended the practice can only help to bring an end to any residual use of this punishment against children elsewhere," Amnesty International said. "Today's ruling is one of the final milestones on the road to a remarkable human rights achievement -- total global abolition of the death penalty against children."

In recent years, the USA had become the only country in the world to openly acknowledge executing child offenders and to claim for itself the right to do so. It accounts for almost half of the world's known executions of child offenders carried out since 1990 -- 19 out of 39. Today's 5-4 ruling by the US Supreme Court noted the "stark reality" that the "United States now stands alone in a world that has turned its face against the juvenile death penalty."

The other executions have occurred in China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. These countries -- which unlike the USA have all ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which prohibits the execution of child offenders -- have either now abolished such use of the death penalty, are in the process of doing so, or deny that they have executed people who were under 18 at the time of the crime.

The international prohibition on executing people for crimes committed when they were children reflects a common understanding that the lives of child offenders -- due to a young person's immaturity, impulsiveness, vulnerability and capacity for rehabilitation -- should never be simply written off, no matter how heinous the crime. Today, the US Supreme Court agreed. It found that the inherent differences

between children and adults meant that child offenders "cannot with reliability be classified among the worst offenders" for which the USA supposedly reserves the death penalty.

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