

PUBLIC

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Further information on UA 253/99 (AMR 51/159/99, 28 September 1999) - Death penalty / Legal concern

USA (North Carolina) Dorthia Bynum (f), black, aged 18

On 14 February 2000, Dorthia Bynum was sentenced to at least 124 years in prison as part of a plea agreement to escape a possible death sentence. In 1999, the prosecution had announced its intention to seek the death penalty against her for a crime she was accused of committing when she was 17 years and three months old. International law forbids the use of the death penalty for crimes committed by under-18-year-olds.

Dorthia Bynum pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and other charges relating to the kidnapping, sexual assault and murder of 10-year-old Tiffany Nicole Long, white, on 17 October 1998. After ruling that her plea was valid, the judge sentenced her to a range of 124 to 153 years in prison. She must serve at least the 124 years before becoming eligible for parole. This sentence violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which prohibits life imprisonment without the possibility of release for crimes committed by under-18-year-olds. Amnesty International is concerned that the threat of a death sentence against Dorthia Bynum unfairly pressurized the defence into accepting this plea bargain.

On 23 February, Dorthia Bynum's nephew, 13 at the time of the crime and now 15, was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced, in violation of the CRC, to life imprisonment without parole.

No further action by the UA Network is requested. Many thanks to all who sent appeals on behalf of Dorthia Bynum. Amnesty International's action on this case, and the international ban on the death penalty against children, was reported in the local media.