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USA set to break a global consensus -- execution of child offender due tonight

Texas executioners are preparing to carry out an internationally illegal execution tonight, Amnesty International warned hours before Gerald Mitchell is due to be killed by lethal injection for a crime committed when he was a child.

"On the one hand the USA is seeking to build an international coalition in response to the crimes of 11 September, while on the other it is set to break an overwhelming global consensus that the crimes of children must never result in the death penalty," the organization said, pointing out that it has long campaigned against the USA's pick and choose approach to international human rights standards.

Gerald Mitchell, an African American, has been on death row for 15 years after being convicted by an all-white jury for the murder of a white man, committed when he was 17 years old. International law, respected by almost every government in the world, unequivocally prohibits the execution of defendants who were under 18 at the time of the crime.

Amnesty International knows of only 12 executions of juvenile offenders worldwide in the past four years: three in Iran, one in the Democratic Republic of Congo and eight in the United States.

"Four of these killings were carried out in Texas during the governorship of George W. Bush," Amnesty International said. "Now that he is President, he has no less an obligation to oppose executions that violate international law," the organization continued.

Amnesty International wrote last week to President Bush's legal counsel, calling for the US administration to intervene in Gerald Mitchell's case. For the past six weeks, Amnesty International activists worldwide have been appealing to Texas and federal authorities to stop the execution of Gerald Mitchell.

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