

PUBLIC

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**Further information on UA 230/02 (AMR 51/121/2002, 24 July 2002) - Death penalty / Legal concern**

**USA (Texas) Michael Scott (m), white, aged 28**

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On 24 September, after deliberating for less than three hours, a jury in Travis County, Texas, decided that Michael Scott should be sentenced to life imprisonment. The prosecution had sought a death sentence; a punishment which would have been illegal under international law as Michael Scott was aged 17 at the time of the crime. International law prohibits the imposition of the death penalty for crimes committed by those under 18.

Michael Scott was charged with capital murder in the case of four teenagers who were killed in a yoghurt shop in Austin on 6 December 1991. The victims were Eliza Thomas, aged 17, Amy Ayers, aged 13, Jennifer Harbison aged 15, and Sarah Harbison, aged 17. They had been stripped, tied up and shot, and the building set on fire.

After over 22 hours of deliberation, the jury voted on 22 September to convict Michael Scott of the murder of Amy Ayers. In the absence of any physical evidence linking Scott to the crime, the prosecution had built its case around a confession he gave to police in 1999 after a lengthy interrogation. He subsequently recanted, saying that it had been coerced.

In the same case, Robert Springsteen was sentenced to death in 2001 for the murder of Amy Ayers. He was also 17 at the time of the crime. His allegedly coerced confession was also an issue at his trial.

One of the defence lawyers involved in Michael Scott's case has asked for the defence team's thanks to be forwarded to all those who sent appeals to the prosecutor not to seek the death penalty. He added "The many letters have not made the District Attorney change his mind, it is too high a profile case for that, and one that already has one death verdict. However, I do believe that the letters will have a long term impact."

Robert Springsteen is one of 27 people on death row in Texas for crimes committed when they were 17. Texas is the USA's worst perpetrator of this internationally illegal aspect of the death penalty, accounting for 13 of the 21 executions of child offenders carried out in the USA since 1977. The USA is now almost the only country in the world that still uses the death penalty for the crimes of under-18-year-olds. For further information, see *USA: Indecent and internationally illegal: The death penalty against child offenders* (AMR 51/143/2002), issued on 25 September with a news release and available on Amnesty International's website ([www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)).

**No further action by the UA Network is requested. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.**