

STOP CHILD EXECUTIONS!



During the past decade and a half, nearly 40 people around the world have been executed for crimes committed when they were children. The use of the death penalty against child offenders – people under 18 at the time of the crime – is clearly prohibited under international law, yet a handful of countries persist with child executions.

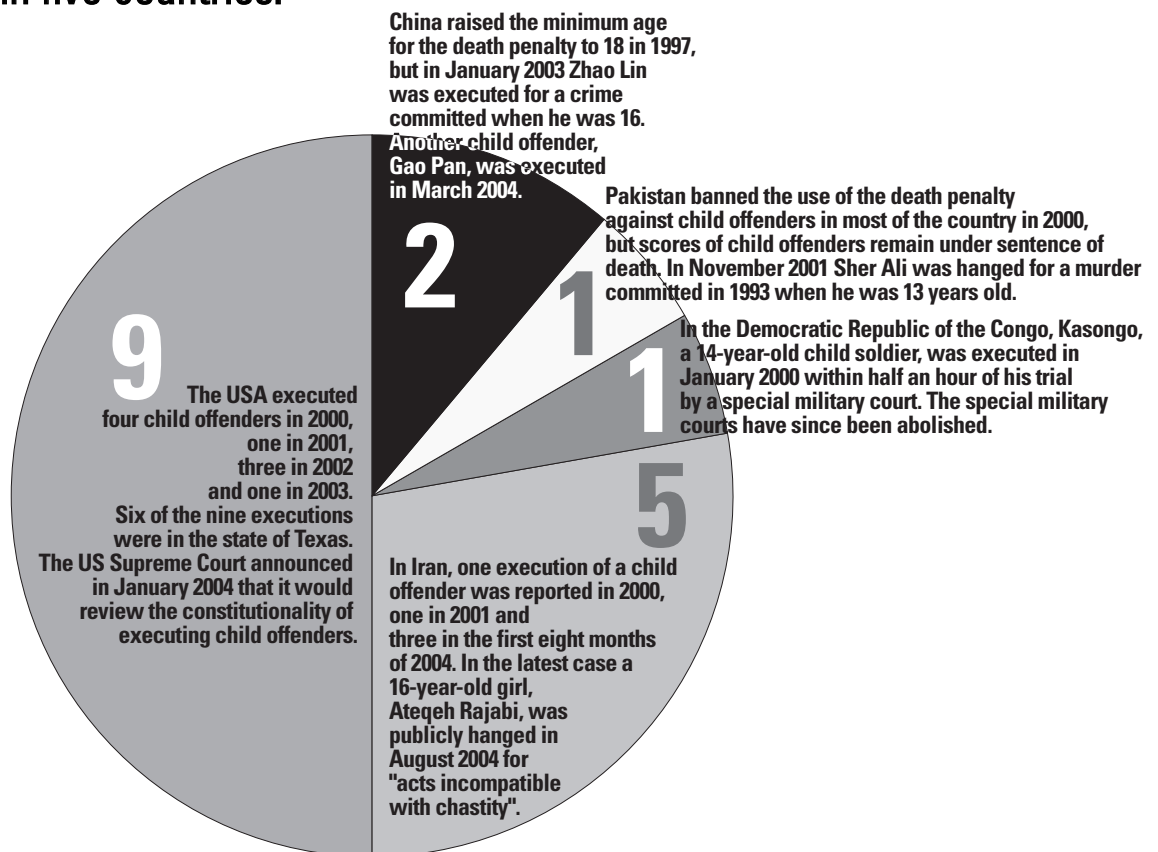
Since 1990 Amnesty International has documented 38 executions of child offenders in eight countries – China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the USA and Yemen.

The USA carried out 19 executions – more than any other country.

Child executions worldwide – a dwindling practice

During the same period, several countries raised to 18 the minimum age for application of the death penalty, in accordance with international law. **Yemen** and **Zimbabwe** raised the minimum age to 18 in 1994, as did **China** in 1997 and **Pakistan** in 2000 (in most of the country). A similar move is reportedly under way in **Iran**.

Since the beginning of 2000 Amnesty International has documented child executions in five countries:



Napoleon Beazley was executed in 2002 in Texas for a murder committed eight years earlier when he was 17 years old. At the trial the white prosecutor described him as an "animal" in front of the all-white jury. Witnesses at the trial cited his potential for rehabilitation. He was a model prisoner.

Ireland and Rena Beazley hold a photo of their son, Napoleon. © AI

CHILD EXECUTIONS VIOLATE INTERNATIONAL LAW

Article 37(a) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states:

"[No] capital punishment... shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age."

The same prohibition appears in three other international human rights treaties – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

All but one country, the USA, have ratified at least one of these treaties without making a reservation to the prohibition. In so doing, they have committed themselves under international law to respect the prohibition. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has held that the prohibition of executing child offenders is a norm of *jus cogens* – a rule of international law which all states must obey.

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"The overwhelming international consensus that the death penalty should not apply to juvenile offenders stems from the recognition that young persons, because of their immaturity, may not fully comprehend the consequences of their actions and should therefore benefit from less severe sanctions than adults. More importantly, it reflects the firm belief that young persons are more susceptible to change, and thus have a greater potential for rehabilitation than adults."

Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 2002



Mary Robinson signs Amnesty International's pledge for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 1997. © AI

OUR CAMPAIGN

Amnesty International believes that the death penalty violates the right to life and is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. As a step towards total abolition of the death penalty, Amnesty International is campaigning with other organizations to end its use against child offenders throughout the world.

WE ARE CALLING FOR:

- An immediate end to all executions of child offenders.
- All existing death sentences against child offenders to be commuted.
- All countries that retain the death penalty to ensure that its use against child offenders is precluded by law.
- Such countries to take measures to ensure that their courts do not sentence child offenders to death, including, where necessary, the examination of birth certificates. Where systems of issuing birth certificates do not exist, such systems should be introduced, as required under Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

To take part in the campaign, or for further information, contact your local Amnesty International section (see box right) or:

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Alleged child offenders awaiting trial, Karachi, Pakistan, June 2003. © AI