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## **MEDIA ADVISORY**

### **OPEN LETTER FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TO PRESIDENT CLINTON, THE LEADERS OF THE US SENATE, AND THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE US SUPREME COURT, CONCERNING THE IMMINENT EXECUTION OF SEAN SELLERS IN OKLAHOMA**

Amnesty International wrote yesterday to President Clinton, Senators Lott and Daschle, and Chief Justice Rehnquist, urging that they take all possible steps to stop the execution of Sean Sellers, who is scheduled to be put to death on 4 February in Oklahoma for crimes committed when he was 16. Sean Sellers would be the first such prisoner executed in the USA since 1959.

At a time when the debate on morality is high in the USA and when the Pope has reiterated his call against the death penalty, Amnesty International is highlighting the existence of a worldwide legal and moral consensus that executing child offenders is wrong.

Amnesty International asks how the international community is to reconcile the USA's repeated claims to be a progressive force for human rights when it is prepared to violate international law in order to execute prisoners for crimes committed in childhood.

In its letter the organization is pointing out that:

- 1) Only three executions of child offenders took place worldwide in 1998, all in the USA. Only five other countries are known to have carried out such executions since 1990. The execution of Sean Sellers will mean that the USA has executed more child offenders since 1990 than the rest of the world combined. The nine such prisoners executed by the USA in this period were all 17 at the time of the crime.
- 2) The ban on executions of people under 18 at the time of the crime is a principle of customary international law. No country is exempt from it, no matter what human rights instruments it has or has not ratified.
- 3) *The responsibility to comply with such a ban does not rest with state authorities only. Under international law, a federal system of government cannot justify a breach of a country's international human rights obligations.*

ENDS.../

**To obtain a copy of the letter, or to arrange an interview on the case of Sean Sellers, call the Amnesty International Press Office on +44 171 413 5566/5808/5810.**