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CORRECTION TO CHILDREN NEWS RELEASE

PLEASE NOTE: Following is the corrected text of the Children news release. Joseph Cannon received a stay of execution and consequently paragraph 11, 12 & 13 have been altered.

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**@CHILDREN TARGETED FOR TERROR
BY STATE AGENTS**

Four years after the United Nations drew up the Convention of the Rights of the Child, children are still being targeted for terrifying human rights violations, Amnesty International said today.

And though the Convention has met with a positive response from governments around the world - no fewer than 149 countries are party to it and 20 more have signed - some of those very same governments are still violating the most basic human rights of their children.

"Incredible as it sounds, children are still suffering every kind of human rights abuse," said the international human rights organization. "Youth offers no protection from the death squads, the state rapists and assassins, the torturers or the executioners.

"Last year, we had to call on our members around the world more than 50 times to take urgent action on behalf of children or young people we knew to be at risk - at risk from the state forces which should have been there to protect them."

China is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - but that didn't protect 16-year-old Tenzin Dekyong, a novice nun in Tibet. She was arrested in March 1993, while she was demonstrating against Chinese rule, and reportedly beaten. She is still in prison, and Amnesty International considers her a prisoner of conscience.

In other cases, children are targeted to get at their parents, to make them confess or perhaps give up their opposition to the government. In other cases, children are singled out because they are seen as a threat themselves, sometimes just by belonging to the wrong ethnic groups or living in the wrong place. And sometimes, children are slaughtered simply because they are thought to be a nuisance - a tragedy seen again and again amid the street children of Brazil and Colombia, for example.

In Bogotá in Colombia last summer, notices appeared all over the city centre inviting street children and other "criminals" to their own funerals. Dozens appeared overnight - and their grim message was by no means an empty threat. "Death squads" are in operation in Colombia, their mission to rid the streets of "socially undesirable" homeless children - what is more, there is evidence that these "death squads" are made up of members of the police force.

Street children often turn to petty crime to stay alive, so local businesses view them as a liability. The businessmen support the "death squads" in so-called clean-up operations - often a euphemism for massacres. In 1991 alone, some 2,800 children were murdered in Colombia.

And appalling as this is, it is far from unusual. Amnesty International is currently in the middle of a major international campaign on political killings and "disappearances" around the world, and children, tragically, feature repeatedly. Among cases highlighted is that of

"Mirsada", a teenage Muslim girl in Bosnia-Herzegovina, who was detained with her sister and others, taken by Serbian forces and held at a notorious former hotel, where they were raped. The other girls were released - "Mirsada" has never been seen again.

And while in some countries, children are killed by state security forces acting outside the law, in a handful of countries, human rights violations against children are part of the legal system - countries such as Iraq, Bangladesh, Pakistan and the USA, where juvenile offenders can be sentenced to death.

In the USA, for example, teenagers are still sentenced to death for crimes they committed while they were perhaps as young as 15 years old. Last year alone, four juvenile offenders were executed in the USA - more than in any other country known to Amnesty International. Two states, Georgia and Missouri, executed juvenile offenders for the first time in over 30 years. The other two executions took place in Texas, where at least ten juvenile offenders remain on death row - almost all of them black or from other ethnic minorities.

The majority of juveniles sentenced to death in the USA come from acutely deprived backgrounds, many suffered gross physical or sexual abuse as children, were of below average intelligence or suffered mental illness or brain damage. A disturbing number had inadequate legal representation at their trials.

"Yet, despite all this, and contrary to international standards and treaties, at least 29 juvenile offenders remain under sentence of death in the USA," said Amnesty International. "Once again, we see the callousness of a nation state that will kill its own children.

"Children need special protection - that is explicitly recognised by the UN and by governments around the world. When are governments going to start giving them that protection?"

"We urge all governments to make it soon, and save children from the jailers, the hitmen, the torturers and the executioners as soon as possible."

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