

URGENT ACTION

NO CLEMENCY IN LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE CASE

Christi Cheramie was sentenced at the age of 16 to life in prison without the possibility of parole. She has been denied clemency by the Louisiana Board of Pardons and must wait seven years before she is permitted to submit a further application for clemency.

On 24 January the Louisiana Board of Pardons reviewed the clemency application submitted by **Christi Cheramie** on 30 November 2011 and denied a clemency hearing for her. This denial, coupled with no access to an appeal process because she submitted a guilty plea in the original trial, means that Christi Cheramie must wait for seven years before she is permitted to submit a further application for clemency.

Christi Cheramie was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of release in June 1994, when she was 16 years old. She had pled guilty to second-degree murder in the killing of her fiancé's great aunt, Mildred Turnage, in February 1994. By pleading guilty to the murder charge before her trial started - a decision she later explained was taken out of fear of being sentenced to death if the trial went ahead - she is prevented from directly appealing against her conviction or sentence. In 2001, she sought to have her guilty plea withdrawn, testifying that she had not understood her rights or the trial proceedings when she pleaded guilty. Her application was denied.

Christi Cheramie is now 33 years old and has already spent more than half her life in prison. She has been described by a prison warden as "a model inmate...who is worthy of a second chance in society." She has completed her education and is now teaching others. She has currently served 17 years of her sentence of life imprisonment without the possibility of release. Such a sentence imposed on a person who was under the age of 18 at the time of the crime is in violation of international law and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Her sentence was imposed after her case was transferred to adult court. No hearing was held to consider evidence that might support keeping her case in juvenile court. At such a hearing, a judge would have been required to consider such factors as her young age, her history of mental health issues, and her amenability to rehabilitation, before ruling on the transfer question.

Amnesty International has called on both the Louisiana Board of Pardons and Governor Jindal to grant a clemency hearing to Christi Cheramie and to ensure that her sentence would be commuted in line with international standards. It has also called on President Barack Obama to work with the US Congress to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which expressly prohibits the imposition this sentence for offences - however serious - committed by people less than 18 years of age. The USA should do so without reservations or other limiting conditions and to fully implement its prohibition on the use of life imprisonment without release against children, including in relation to the cases of those already sentenced.

No further action through the UA network is requested. Many thanks for all your appeals.

This is the first update of UA 12/12. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/005/2012/en>

Name: Christi Cheramie

Gender m/f: F

Further information on UA: 12/12 Index: AMR 51/010/2012 Issue Date: 7 February 2012