

9 June 1999

Further information UA 113/99 (AMR 51/82/99, 19 May 1999) - Death Penalty / Legal Concern**USA (Nevada) Sean DIXON, aged 19**

Sean Dixon is no longer facing the death penalty. On 8 June, Amnesty International received the following e-mail message from one of Sean Dixon's lawyers:

"I am thrilled to inform you that the campaign on behalf of Sean Dixon worked. The case was negotiated yesterday, the State dismissed the notice of intent to seek the death penalty, and Sean will receive a sentence that permits parole. The prosecutor informed me that he received over 200 letters from Amnesty members, although he refuses to acknowledge that the letters played any role in his decision not to seek the death penalty against Sean. Thanks again for your efforts. I believe that it had an enormous impact on the prosecutor's change of heart."

On 8 June the *Las Vegas Review Journal*, one of the two local newspapers targeted for UA appeals, noted that an "international letter-writing campaign" had argued to the prosecution that Sean Dixon's execution "would violate a worldwide ban on the use of the death penalty against those under the age of 18 at the time of the crime" (Sean Dixon was 16). The newspaper also noted that the prosecutor denied that the letter-writing campaign had influenced his decision, and that the "prosecutors said that the legal arguments contained in the letters were inaccurate." This is a characteristic response from those US officials who support the use of the death penalty against children and argue that the USA is exempted from international law on this issue (for further information, see *On the Wrong Side of History: Children and the Death Penalty in the USA*, AMR 51/58/98, October 1998).

The other newspaper which received appeals, the *Las Vegas Sun*, reported that "members of Amnesty International from Ireland, Belgium, England, France, Germany and the United States" had sent appeals urging that the state adhere to international law. In the same article, the second of Sean Dixon's defence attorneys was quoted as saying: "The letters were 50 per cent responsible for the state coming to the conclusion that the plea bargain should be made in this case".

At the court hearing on 7 June at which Sean Dixon pleaded guilty to first-degree murder, he told the judge that he did not kill his father, but would not name the person who did. In accepting responsibility for his own involvement in the crime, he reportedly told the judge: "I was involved in a robbery that resulted in the death of my father, and I knew a weapon would be involved." The prosecution did not dispute that Sean Dixon was not the person who pulled the trigger.

Sean Dixon will be formally sentenced on 18 August to 40 years in prison, reduced by the three years he has already been in jail awaiting trial. In a phone call to Amnesty International, his lawyer (who sent the e-mail message above) has stated that this is the best outcome that the defence could have hoped to achieve, even if everything had gone their way at Sean's trial. Although he currently has to serve his full sentence before becoming eligible for parole, she explained

that Sean could become eligible for parole earlier, depending on his prison record and the success of future appeals.

Sean Dixon reportedly wishes to serve his sentence in his native Indiana, which prosecutors will not oppose. During his three years in jail, Sean has had no access to educational or work programs. In state prison he will have access to such programs, and he intends to begin by completing his high school diploma.

Please cease all appeals on this case. Many thanks to all who took action on behalf of Sean Dixon.