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### **USA: Time to stop executing juvenile offenders and join the modern world**

The emergency court-issued reprieve granted to Napoleon Beazley less than four hours before his execution yesterday gives the United States the opportunity to step back and reflect upon the massive national and international condemnation that the planned killing of this juvenile offender raised, Amnesty International said today.

"The USA must no longer ignore the fact that it is clinging to a shameful practice that beyond its borders has almost been eradicated from the world," the organization added. "It is time for US officialdom to bring their country into line with international law and standards of decency recognized in every corner of the globe."

Amnesty International is calling for principled leadership at all levels of government in the USA. "Prosecutors should stop pursuing the death penalty against under-18-year-olds. Courts should accept the supremacy of international law. State legislators should bring their laws into line with international standards. Clemency authorities should prevent the execution of offenders who were under 18 at the time of the crime," the organization said.

"We also reiterate our call to President Bush and his administration to meet their international legal obligation to oppose the death penalty against children in all states of the USA," Amnesty International said. "To do otherwise will bring continuing scorn upon US claims to be a progressive force for human rights."

"We are under no illusion about the size of the task ahead to convince the United States to join the modern world on this fundamental human rights issue," Amnesty International continued, noting that Texas has just scheduled the execution of another juvenile offender, and that sentencing hearings begin today in Georgia and North Carolina at which juries will decide whether two 17-year-old offenders should live or die. Like Napoleon Beazley, all three individuals are African American.

Gerald Mitchell has just received an execution date of 22 October for a murder committed when he was 17 years old. He is one of 31 juvenile offenders on death row in Texas.

Yesterday, a Georgia jury found Marcus Moore guilty of murder. On Tuesday, a jury in North Carolina convicted Antwoun Sims of murder. Both were 17 at the time of the crime. In both cases sentencing phase evidence hearings will begin today. Amnesty International has been appealing to the prosecutors in both cases to drop their pursuit of the death penalty.

There are around 80 prisoners on death row in the USA for crimes committed when they were 16 or 17. The USA leads a tiny group of countries which have executed child offenders in the past decade. In the past four years only the USA (8), Iran (3), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (1) are reported to have carried out such executions. Earlier this year, the Democratic Republic of Congo commuted the death sentences of five children. China, the world's leading executing state, abolished the death penalty for under-18-year-olds in 1997.

"If virtually the rest of the world can do it, why not the United States?," Amnesty International asked. "Other governments should ask their US counterparts this question at every turn."

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