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International Week of Student Action: Adding thousands of voices against the death penalty for child offenders

"The act I committed to put me here was not just heinous, it was senseless. But the person that committed that act is no longer here. I'm sorry that John Luttig died. And I'm sorry that it was something in me that caused all of this to happen to begin with. Tonight, we tell the world that there are no second chances in the eyes of justice. No one wins tonight. No one gets closure. No one walks away victorious."

Final statement of Napoleon Beazley, child offender, executed in the USA, May 2002.

Thousands of young people and students all over the world will today start a week of action against the execution of child offenders, those under 18 years old at the time of the crime.

"Starting over the next seven days, students will add their voices to tens of thousands of people already calling for an end to this indecent and internationally illegal practice," said Amnesty International.

Activists from over 30 countries will carry out a wide range of actions, from writing letters to government authorities in the USA and Pakistan to demonstrations in front of embassies, as well as activities to raise awareness of this shameful practice. In the USA alone, more than 400 student groups from nearly every state will take part in the campaign. Global campaign highlights include radio and television programs in the Netherlands, debates in Tanzanian schools and colleges, a football tournament in Venezuela, exhibitions and film screenings in educational institutions in Hong Kong and a conference in a Lebanese university.

Amnesty International has documented executions of child offenders in eight countries since 1990: China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the United States of America and Yemen.

Since 2000, 15 executions of child offenders have taken place in the world. Nine of them were in the USA.

In Iran, Mohammad Mohammadzadeh was executed on 25 January 2004 for a crime committed when he was 17 years old, even though in December 2003 the Iranian parliament approved a bill to raise the minimum age for imposition of the death penalty to 18 years. The bill currently awaits consideration by the country's highest legislative body, the Guardian Council.

In the USA, the Supreme Court agreed last month to revisit its 1989 ruling allowing the execution of 16- and 17-year-old offenders. Bills to raise the minimum age to 18 are pending in several US state legislatures. Despite these developments, four executions of child offenders remain scheduled to take place in Texas in the first half of 2004.

"The latest developments offer hope that the USA will join the overwhelming global consensus that such use of the death penalty is wrong and end the threat of execution looming over more than 70 people on death row for crimes committed when they were under 18 years old," Amnesty International concluded.

Background Information

Amnesty International has been campaigning against the use of the death penalty for 40 years. On 21 January, the organization launched a two-year action aimed at ending the execution of child offenders throughout the world by the end of 2005.

For more information on the International's week of student action, please see:

AIUSA Website: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/abolish/juveniles/>

For more information on Amnesty International's campaign against the death penalty on child offenders, please see:

Amnesty International Death penalty website: <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/deathpenalty-index-eng>

Updated Facts and Figures on death penalty against child offenders:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGPOL300072004>

Updated Summary of cases of child offenders: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGPOL300062004>

Public Document

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