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NIGERIA: CHILD PRISONER FREE AFTER 17 YEARS

A Nigerian 31-year old man who was sentenced to death as a juvenile has expressed his happiness at being released from prison and reunited with his family after such a very long time, following a relentless global campaign by Amnesty International.

Patrick Okoroafor was just 14 when he was arrested in 1995 and 16 when sentenced to death for armed robbery, a crime which he says he didn't commit.

Amnesty International considers Patrick's Okoroafor's trial to have been grossly unfair and has repeatedly called for his immediate and unconditional release.

Authorities in Nigeria's Imo State commuted Patrick Okoroafor's sentence to life imprisonment months after the original death sentence was imposed. In October 2001, a High Court judgement pronounced the sentence of death on him to be unlawful, null and void and changed his sentence to detention "during the pleasure of the governor" – indefinite detention.

In 2009, one year after Amnesty International launched its campaign to release Patrick Okoroafor; his sentence was reduced to ten years. The following year it was reduced again to two years. He was finally released on 30 April 2012.

Patrick Okoroafor featured regularly in Amnesty's global solidarity letter-writing campaign and has received more than 10,000 cards and letters. In writing a letter of gratitude in 2010, Patrick Okoroafor encouraged his supporters to not give up in their efforts of campaigning for him. He wrote:

Upon his release Patrick Okoroafor said:

"After Amnesty began its call for my release from prison, and after reading some of the thousands of letters, card and messages sent to me by Amnesty supporters, I began to hope that I would soon be free in the not too distant future."

Amnesty International's Nigeria Researcher Lucy Freeman said:

"It is fantastic that Patrick Okoroafor is finally free. Patrick was denied the right to a fair trial and was a victim of a miscarriage of justice.

"Unfortunately, Patrick Okoroafor was just one of many prisoners in Nigeria who did not have a fair trial. Human rights violations are prevalent in Nigeria's justice system. Arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and unfair trials are features of many inmates' experience."