

Spare the Child

Over the past 15 years the world has made major strides toward ending the execution of juvenile offenders. Since 1989, Barbados, Yemen, Zimbabwe, China, and Pakistan abolished death sentences for defendants who were under 18 at the time of the offense, although China and Pakistan have had problems with nationwide compliance. Iran is considering a law to stop the practice, and other countries—including Saudi Arabia and Nigeria—have effectively placed a moratorium on juvenile executions.

In 2004, Wyoming and South Dakota joined the growing number of U.S. states preventing juveniles from receiving the death penalty. The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to announce a decision early in 2005 on *Roper v. Simmons*, a case that questions the constitutional legitimacy of capital punishment for juvenile offenders.

The United States sentences more juveniles to death than any other country, even though a 2002 Gallup Poll showed that 69 percent of Americans oppose such penalties. Nine of the 18 juvenile executions worldwide since 2000 took place in the United

States, and Texas accounts for more than one-third of the approximately 72 inmates on death row for crimes committed when they were minors. "Since



Napoleon Beazley, sentenced to death for a murder he committed at age 17. He was executed in 2002.

Toshi Kazama

2002 we are the only country to legally and openly execute a juvenile offender," says Sapna Mirchandani, Program Coordinator at the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty.

Imposing capital punishment on juvenile offenders violates seven international treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The United States is the only country besides Somalia that has failed to ratify the convention.

Carin Zissis

amnestyusa.org/abolish/juveniles/

"Spare the child. Spare the family. Spare the community. Spare us all the degradation of the death of another child offender, when by opening the hope of a future for him and his family, you give hope to us all."

—Archbishop Desmond Tutu in a letter to the Texas parole board asking for clemency for juvenile offender Napoleon Beazley, who was executed on May 28, 2002 for a murder he committed at age 17.

Mind Games

The wails of veiled women rising from a bombed out Muslim village make playing the video game "September 12" disturbing rather than fun—but that's the point. The creators of newsgaming.com want to trigger debate, not entertain. Players must try to shoot down terrorists with an imprecise weapon that will frustrate hardcore gamers, but the unavoidable civilian casualties are very much intentional. "We used as a model political cartoons, which are simplistic but at the same time they convey powerful ideas," said Gonzalo Frasca, head designer of the Uruguay-based team behind the games. Even as a player strikes a terrorist, civilians mourning innocent casualties turn into terrorists in "September 12." The player can't lose—but can't win either.

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