

Press release

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US Supreme Court decision on child offenders doesn't cleanse death penalty system, says US Human Rights Network

"While today's US Supreme Court decision outlawing the execution of child offenders will finally bring the US in line with international law on this issue and thus should be welcomed, it should be seen as only another step on the overall road towards the complete abolition of the death penalty in the US," said Rick Halperin, President of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and member of the US Human Rights Network, a grouping of over 160 US-based human rights organizations.

"The risk is that people may see the Roper vs. Simmons decision as somehow cleansing the death penalty – by simply removing one of its most offensive elements. But the truth is that the death penalty system in the US as a whole remains inherently flawed, brutally racist, and continually prone to imprison and execute innocent people," said Halperin. "The death penalty is what it has always been and will always be: a symbolic, practical and complete failure for this nation to both realistically work towards a meaningful solution to violent crime and to comply with global human rights standards."

"While we of course welcome the fact that 78 child offenders will now be taken off death row, they should never have been there in the first place," said Ajamu Baraka, Executive Director of the US Human Rights Network. "Sentencing child offenders to death has been illegal under international law for almost thirty years and the federal government should have banned it a long time ago to bring the US in line with international standards – not wait for the Supreme Court to come to this long overdue decision."

Halperin cautioned about being too euphoric in the wake of the Roper vs Simmons decision, noting that Georgia will be carrying out an execution later this evening. "There are 10 more executions scheduled in this country in March alone," Halperin said.

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