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From: Shankar Gopalakrishnan <sg584@bard.edu>  
Subject: Oppose Death Penalty for Youth  
To: Governor Kirk Fordice <governor@govoff.state.ms.us>  
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Dear Governor Fordice:

In July, the Florida Supreme Court outlawed the state's use of the death penalty against sixteen-year-olds, and the Montana legislature recently voted for a bill abolishing the death penalty for those under eighteen at the time of their crimes. Montana's new law will come into effect on 1 October 1999.

In June, the US Supreme Court asked the federal government for its position on the USA's continuing use of the death penalty against children. Amnesty International members worldwide are urging the government to honor its international obligations when formulating its response to the Court, and to begin to match its repeated claims to be a world leader in human rights.

The global ban on the death penalty against children is now so widely recognized and adhered to that it has become a norm of customary international law, binding on all countries regardless of which international instruments they have or have not agreed to be bound by.

Worldwide, in the past two years, only four people are known to have been executed for crimes committed when they were under 18. All four were put to death in the USA. Sean Sellers was the most recent to be killed, and the first in the USA for a crime committed at sixteen in forty years.

"In the past seven years there have been 11 known executions of child offenders worldwide, eight of them in the USA." Amnesty International said. The other three executions since 1992 were in Pakistan, Iran and Yemen. Yemen has since changed its law to abolish the death penalty for those under 18 at the time of the crime. In 1997, China, the country responsible for the highest annual judicial death toll in the world, also abolished the death penalty for those under eighteen at the time of the crime.

Governor Fordice, please place Mississippi at the head of the line following the international community in banning the use of the death penalty for those under eighteen at the time of their crime.

Sincerely,

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