



THE JUVENILE DEATH PENALTY INITIATIVE

Media Advisory

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For Immediate Release

Human Rights and Legal Experts Welcome Governor Musgrove's Decision to Stop Execution of Ron Chris Foster

Washington, DC: The Juvenile Death Penalty Initiative (JDPI) welcomes the decision by Governor Ronald Musgrove to grant a temporary reprieve in the case of Ron Chris Foster, pending decisions to be made by the US and Mississippi Supreme Courts concerning the constitutionality of executing Foster. Foster, who was 17 at the time of the crime, with no prior criminal history and is arguably mentally retarded, would be the first juvenile offender to be executed by the state of Mississippi since the death penalty was reinstated in the US in 1976.

JDPI recognizes that the reprieve is temporary in nature and urges the Governor to continue to deliberate upon the numerous aspects of this case.

"Given that the landmark *Atkins* decision by the US Supreme Court last June barred execution of the mentally retarded 'because of their disabilities in the areas of reasoning, judgment and control of their impulses,' and given that the Supreme Court may well rule, for similar reasons, this winter to bar the execution of minors, the Governor is sending a clear message that a rush to execute Ron Chris Foster may well put Mississippi on the wrong side of science, evolving standards of decency, public opinion, and most importantly, history," said Vincent Schiraldi, President of the Justice Policy Institute.

The US now prohibits states from executing persons with mental retardation due, in part, to their limited culpability for criminal acts. However, it stands virtually alone within the world community in its continued practice of executing juvenile offenders. In fact, only seven states in the US – Texas, Virginia, Georgia, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma and South Carolina – have executed juvenile offenders since reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976.

"Whilst a person must be held accountable for their actions, to execute a juvenile offender can never be an appropriate response. A juvenile offender does not possess the requisite culpability to warrant the ultimate punishment," said Anne James, Executive Director of the International Justice Project.

A web site has been established by the American Bar Association's Juvenile Justice Center containing information about cases of juvenile offenders on death rows in the US and the juvenile death penalty in general at www.abanet.org/crimjust/juvjus/juvdp.html

Further information on the juvenile death penalty and international context can be found at the International Justice Project website at www.internationaljusticeproject.org

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A COLLABORATIVE
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The International Justice
Project

The Justice Policy Institute

Children and Family
Justice Center
at Bluhm Legal Clinic
of the Northwestern
University School of Law

Florida Justice Institute

American Bar Association
Juvenile Justice Center