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## PLEA TO HELP END WRONGFUL INCARCERATION OF 15-YEAR-OLD HONOR STUDENT

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"As a private investigator that specializes in criminal defense and catastrophic personal injury cases, I thought that after 21 years in this business ... having been involved in over 30 wrongful conviction cases ... I would see a decline in police and prosecution misconduct. Misconduct is defined as *managing badly or dishonestly*. What it should be called is misdeed, which is defined as *a wrong or wicked act*. We are saddened to report that police and prosecutorial misconduct is alive and well in America, and it is indeed wicked."

—Paul J. Ciolino, renown private investigator<sup>1</sup> and author of  
*In the Company of Giants: The Ultimate Investigation Guide  
for Legal Professionals, Journalists & the Wrongly Convicted*—

### HONOR STUDENT RECEIVES THREE LIFE SENTENCES

**E**fren Paredes, Jr., was arrested March 15, 1989 at age 15 and charged with murder and armed robbery in St. Joseph, Michigan, United States of America ("USA"). He is innocent of the crime and has maintained his innocence since the day of his arrest. Efren's parents and younger brothers know he is innocent because he was home with them when the crime occurred. He had no previous criminal record and was an honor student at the time of his arrest.

Despite three other juveniles pleading guilty in the case, Efren was still convicted of the crime. There were no eyewitnesses to the crime and Efren was convicted solely on circumstantial evidence. He was subsequently sentenced as an adult to two sentences of life without parole for the homicide and one life sentence for the armed robbery. The sentencing guidelines for the armed robbery charge was 3 to 8 years.

As of February 1, 2005 all the juveniles who entered guilty pleas in connection with this case have been released, including the one who plead guilty to murder and armed robbery. Efren is the only person still serving time in prison for the crime. Efren is now 32-years-old and has served nearly 17 years in prison to date.

Efren is one of 43 individuals presently serving sentences of life without parole in the State of Michigan for crimes they were accused of committing at age 15. He is also the first Berrien County juvenile to be tried and sentenced as an adult after the passage of a 1988 Michigan law which allowed prosecutors to try 15-year-olds in adult court.

You are encouraged to visit the following web site to learn more about Efren's wrongful incarceration which can be viewed at: [www.4Efren.com](http://www.4Efren.com). A writing which highlights a number of positive developments that have occurred regarding Efren's wrongful conviction since the web site was last updated is available upon request.



Efren Paredes, Jr., age 15

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<sup>1</sup>Paul J. Ciolino is also currently working to exonerate Efren Paredes, Jr. of the false charges against him.

## HOW YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO OUR CAMPAIGN

We have mailed letters to 100 heads of state across the globe whose countries have ratified the CRC. Our letter requests that they write a letter condemning the three life sentences imposed on Efred as an ongoing violation of human rights. We are also contacting numerous attorneys, professors, legislators, members of the clergy, representatives of the print, radio and television media, and activists working to end the practice of sentencing juveniles to life imprisonment without possibility of parole, asking them to write a letter on Efred's behalf.

Upon receiving letters from persons who respond, we will begin distributing copies of the package of letters to people who are working to end the practice of sentencing juveniles to life imprisonment without possibility of parole, and others who have the ability to change this practice.



Efred Paredes, Jr., age 31

**We hereby request that you please write a letter condemning the three life sentences imposed on Efred by the State of Michigan as an ongoing human rights violation in clear contravention with the CRC.**

If you are unable to write a letter condemning the life sentences imposed on Efred as a human rights violation due to constraints or policies prohibiting you to do so by your employer, we ask that you please exercise your First Amendment right to freedom of speech and expression, and compose a letter on Efred's behalf as an individual citizen, totally independent of your place of employment. Alternatively, if you do not wish to write a letter specifically condemning Efred's sentence, we ask that you please write a letter addressed to The Injustice Must End stating your opinion about the practice of imposing life sentences on juveniles accused of committing crimes at age 15.

You are encouraged to include a synopsis of your credentials in your letter so the intended receiver will appreciate the source of its valued contents. Feel free to send to other officials, as well.

The letters will serve as evidence that the civilized nations of the world find it deplorable for the USA to continue its flagrant violation of human rights with respect to its children. It our hope that the letters will also inspire others to join in our concerted efforts to obtain justice in Efred's case. Together we can work to ensure that internationally accepted standards of human rights and morality are respected by every nation. With increased global awareness about the injustices children are enduring in the USA criminal justice system—and proper support from other civilized nations—we will be able to achieve our goal.

Efred's family welcomes any suggestions and information you may be able to provide which may assist us bring attention to his wrongful conviction and the issue of persons being sentenced to life in prison for crimes they committed—or were accused of committing—as juveniles.

If you are interested in reading Efred's preliminary examination transcripts, trial transcripts, sentencing transcripts, motion for new trial hearing transcripts, newspaper articles about his case, or any court of appeals opinions in his case, they are available electronically in PDF format upon request. Efred's web site is also available in PDF format. Feel free to send an e-mail to [eparedes@aol.com](mailto:eparedes@aol.com) and please put in subject line, "Efred Paredes," with your request for items in the e-mail.

Please share Efred's case and web site with as many people possible. If you received this letter via e-mail

please forward it to others. If you received this letter via U.S. Mail please make a few photocopies of the letter and share it with others, and encourage them to do the same. We believe Efren's case can serve as an excellent model to show the serious problems which exist in the USA's criminal justice system and how easily a child can be wrongly accused and subsequently sentenced to life in prison.

We invite you to link Efren's web site to any web site(s) you have, or are a part of, that address problems in the juvenile justice system, racial injustice in the criminal justice system, and/or children sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole being a violation of the CRC. You are encouraged to also place links to Efren's web site on Internet message boards, blogs, guest books, and on media editorial pages and comment sections.

Thank you for your time and consideration and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

The Injustice Must End  
P.O. Box 858  
Battle Creek, MI 49016  
E-mail: [eparedes@aol.com](mailto:eparedes@aol.com)

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## EFREN'S CASE RECEIVES GROWING SUPPORT FROM INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

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### ACLU OF MICHIGAN REPORT

A profile about Efren is featured in a report released September 14, 2004 by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Michigan. The report, titled *Second Chances: Juveniles Serving Life Without Parole in Michigan Prisons*, can be viewed at: [www.aclumich.org/pubs/juvenilelifers.pdf](http://www.aclumich.org/pubs/juvenilelifers.pdf). Efren's profile appears on page 16 of the report.<sup>1</sup>

### UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO, INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS CLINIC REPORT

April 8, 2005 University of San Francisco Professor Connie de la Vega, along with seven of her students, presented a human rights report on various subjects at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. The report was presented on behalf of the University of San Francisco, International Human Rights Clinic, Human Rights Advocates.

The report, to the 61st Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, is titled *Administration of Justice Agenda Item 13: The Death Penalty and Life Imprisonment Without the Possibility of Release for Youth Offenders Who Were Under the Age of 18 at the Time of the Offense*. Efren's case was referenced in a speech presented at the United Nations by one of the students, Angela M. Fitzsimons, which addressed the universal abolition of juvenile life without parole.

Efren's case was the only one specifically named in the speech from the USA regarding a person being sentenced to life without parole who is still in prison for a crime he was accused of committing when he was a juvenile. The following appeared in the speech:

The case of Efren Paredes, Jr. exemplifies the unfairness of trying juveniles as adults. He was fifteen when he was accused of robbing a grocery store and killing the manager; he was sentenced to life without parole despite having no prior criminal history. When Efren was tried, the judge exercised his option to sentence him as an adult. The judge's decision was based on the seriousness of the crime, Efren's apparent lack of remorse, and his denial of involvement. He remains in prison after 16 years, despite being a model prisoner, while his codefendants have all since been released.

(Angela M. Fitzsimons. *Administration of Justice Agenda Item 13: The Death Penalty and Life Imprisonment Without the Possibility of Release for Youth Offenders Who Were Under the Age of 18 at the Time of the Offense*, Part II. Juvenile Life Without Parole, §A. Juvenile Life Without Parole Violates Customary International Law. pp. 10-11. Berkeley: Human Rights Advocates (2005). Available on the Internet at: [www.humanrightsadvocates.org/images/Juvenile%20Sentences.doc](http://www.humanrightsadvocates.org/images/Juvenile%20Sentences.doc))

Professor de la Vega and her students raised awareness about the issue of juvenile life without parole at the

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<sup>1</sup>All documents which links on this page reference appear on our web site.

Commission on Human Rights by distributing the report to delegates, making an oral statement on the issue, and talking to various delegates about the status of the juvenile life without parole sentences in their countries.

Professor de la Vega filed a brief of *amicus curiae* on behalf of the Human Rights Committee of the Bar of England and Wales, Human Rights Advocates, Human Rights Watch, and the World Organization for Human Rights USA in *Roper v. Simmons*, 125 S.Ct. 1183 (2005). The brief urged the court to abolish the imposition of the death penalty on juvenile offenders. The U.S. Supreme Court subsequently banned juvenile death penalty sentences in the country on March 1, 2005.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH AND AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT**

October 12, 2005 Human Rights Watch ("HRW") and Amnesty International jointly released a report titled, *The Rest of Their Lives: Life without Parole for Child Offenders in the United States*. The report is the first national report on the subject of juvenile life without parole. The organization views juvenile life without parole as a serious human rights abuse, in violation of the United Nations Convention On the Rights of the Child, Article 37. HRW also intends to advocate for parole hearings for all persons currently serving the sentence for crimes committed as children.

HRW used photographs of Efren and other youth, excerpts from newspaper articles regarding their cases, and other information related to their cases in its juvenile life without parole report and on the Internet. They plan to also use them on television and in a video documentary about juvenile life without parole in the United States. A photograph of Efren appears on the HRW web site and on the cover of their juvenile life without parole report. Efren's family also provided HRW with a DVD which contains extensive television news media footage of Efren at the time of his arrest and during his court proceedings to be used in HRW's video documentary.

Efren's mother spoke at the press release for the report which took place in Detroit, Michigan. She was one of four parents asked to attend the event on behalf of those serving life without parole for crimes they were convicted of committing when they were children. After the event Efren's mother, step-father and a family friend, appeared on a Detroit radio talk show for an hour to discuss Efren's case. Efren's parents were also interviewed by *The Michigan Citizen* newspaper for an article which appeared in their periodical, and they were subsequently interviewed by a BBC News reporter for a segment that aired on BBC News later that evening.

The HRW report can be viewed at: <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/us1005/>.

## **COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY HUMAN RIGHTS CLINIC RESEARCH**

April 8, 2005, interns from the University of Michigan working for attorney Deborah LaBelle, project director for the ACLU Juvenile Life Without Parole Initiative, met with Efren, along with a Columbia University school of law student.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss plans to file a petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights arguing that imposing sentences of life without parole on juveniles violates the American Convention on Human Rights, Nov. 22, 1969, 1144 U.N.T.S. 143 (entered into force July 19, 1978), United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Nov. 20, 1989, art. 37, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3, 28 I.L.M. 1448 (entered into force Sept. 2, 1990), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171 (entered into force Mar. 23, 1976).

Efren answered questions presented to him regarding the juvenile experience in adult courts, jails and prisons. He was also afforded the opportunity to share some of the research he has conducted in the fields of adolescent development, juvenile justice, and international laws and treaties regarding juveniles and human rights. A petition is currently being drafted to be filed with the Inter-American Court of Justice in an effort to get the court to rule that the imposition of life without parole sentences on children is a human rights violation.

### **BILL INTRODUCED IN MICHIGAN TO ABOLISH JUVENILE LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE**

Sen. Liz Brater, D-Ann Arbor, announced a four-bill package Tuesday, October 18, 2005 she said would give children convicted of violent crimes a second chance at life by giving them a chance for parole. Brater said keeping people under age 18 from voting or serving on a jury while saying they're old enough to serve life in prison sets a dangerous double standard. "These children have committed horrible crimes, and must be held accountable for their actions," she said. "No one is saying these individuals should get off with just a slap on the wrist, but locking them away forever ignores the fact that there is a chance they could eventually become productive members of society."

Efren's mother, and other members of the family, attended a press conference in Lansing, Michigan at the capitol building, which announced Sen. Brater's bill. Efren's mother spoke at the press conference in opposition to juveniles serving life without parole sentences, and in support of Sen. Brater's bill. After the press conference Efren's family was interviewed by an Associated Press writer who wrote an article about Sen. Brater's bill and Efren's case, which was featured in several newspapers across the State of Michigan on Saturday, October 28, 2005 and Sunday, October 29, 2005. ■