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U.S. v. Georgia



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**HUMAN
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**HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH STATEMENT
ON U.S.-GEORGIA AGREEMENT ON JUVENILE JUSTICE**

March 18, 1998
For immediate release

Contact: Jo Becker, Advocacy Coordinator
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Human Rights Watch is an independent, non-governmental organization that conducts regular, systematic investigations of human rights abuses in some seventy countries around the world. We have had an interest in Georgia's juvenile justice system since 1996, when we conducted an investigation into detention conditions for children in Georgia. Our investigation found that children are subject to physical abuse, grossly inadequate education and mental health care, and overcrowded conditions that fail to meet even basic standards of decency. These findings were recently confirmed by an extensive Department of Justice investigation, which identified a "pattern of egregious conditions violating the federal rights" of children in detention.

The gross abuses and inadequacies of Georgia's juvenile detention facilities not only violate children's rights under the US Constitution, but also violate international human rights standards. Under international law, governments have an obligation to protect the human rights of persons taken into their custody, and to guarantee minimal standards of decency.

We welcome the news that additional resources are being allocated to the juvenile justice system, and the Governor's efforts to respond quickly to the Justice Department's report. We also applaud plans to improve health care, mental health services, and educational opportunities for detained youth. However, we do not believe that the measures announced today by the Governor's office and the Department of Justice adequately address the severe problems evident in Georgia's juvenile detention system.

We are particularly troubled that this agreement has been reached without any participation or input from the child advocacy community, civil and human rights community, and other non-governmental parties who are concerned about the welfare of children in Georgia.

At a minimum, Human Rights Watch believes that an adequate response must include the following:

1) Mechanisms to ensure rigorous enforcement of regulations against physical abuse of children by DJJ staff. Such mechanisms must include staff