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May 24, 2010

Good rulings on youths, sex offenders

Daily Star

The Supreme Court recently made two good decisions regarding sentencing of two particular groups of individuals.

The justices wisely ruled that youths cannot be sentenced to life without parole unless they are convicted of murder.

This extends an earlier ruling outlawing the execution of murderers who were younger than 18 at the time of the crime.

According to Justice Anthony Kennedy, these juveniles, particularly those serving long prison sentences, should be given a "meaningful" chance to show eventually they should be released.

Because youths usually serve considerably longer life sentences than adult prisoners, the majority found life sentences to be in violation of the Constitution's ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

The decision rightly allows those with criminal records early in life opportunities to — whether within the corrections system or general society — make amends for their deeds.

While some may become criminals as adults, others may reform and earn the right to live freely among us as honest citizens for the rest of their lives.

As Kennedy wrote in his opinion, "By denying the defendant the right to re-enter the community, the state makes an irrevocable judgment about the person's value and place in society. This judgment is not appropriate in light of a juvenile nonhomicide offender's capacity for change and moral culpability."

The high court made another good call when it decided "sexually dangerous" offenders can be detained even after their federal prison terms have been completed if they could be dangerous in the future.

That ruling — upholding the constitutionality of the 2006 Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act — allows the federal government to exercise the same power states possess.

The court had decided at an earlier date that states can seek civil commitment of sex offenders they considered still dangerous when their prison sentences had fulfilled.

Any decision allowing for the further incarceration of potentially dangerous sex offenders, keeping them off the streets, is a good one.

This ruling goes beyond the often-difficult task of registering and keeping track of convicted sex offenders who move between cities and states without notifying authorities, slipping through the hands of state law officials.

By keeping offenders within the federal prison system, perhaps these dangerous individuals may be better monitored and tracked.

The decision upholding the law helps the government do one of its most important jobs — protect the lives of our children and all of us.