

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

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**EXTRA 02/95**

**Death Penalty**

**6 January 1995**

**USA (Virginia)**

**Dana EDMONDS (male)**

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Dana Edmonds is scheduled to be executed in Virginia on 24 January 1994.

Dana Edmonds, black, was sentenced to death in 1983 for the murder of John Elliot, white, during the robbery of a grocery store.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

As of October 1994 there were 55 prisoners under sentence of death in Virginia. Since executions resumed in 1982, 24 prisoners have been put to death in the state under its present death penalty laws. The most recent person to be executed in Virginia was Timothy Spencer, on 27 April 1994. On July 1 1994 the law was changed in Virginia to allow prisoners sentenced to death the choice of execution by electrocution or lethal injection. Previously executions had been by electrocution only. In Virginia the authority to grant executive clemency lies with the state governor.

Many research studies, including those of Amnesty International, have found that the death penalty in the USA is applied in a racially discriminatory manner.

Studies conducted nationwide have shown that murders involving white victims are far more likely to result in death sentences than those with black victims.

One such study published in 1984 looked at racial patterns in capital sentencing in eight US states from 1976 to 1980 including Virginia, and found disproportionate capital sentencing for white-victim cases in each state.

Racial disparities in death sentencing are confirmed by the findings of a report by the General Accounting Office (GAO), an independent agency of the federal government, published in February 1990. The GAO found that persons convicted of the murder of white victims are far more likely to be sentenced to death than those convicted of black-victim homicides. These racial disparities remained after all other legally relevant factors had been taken into account.

As of October 1994, there were 2,948 prisoners under sentence of death in the USA, of whom 1,180 - over 40% - were black. The percentage of black prisoners on death rows in some individual states is much higher. Blacks make up only 12.6% of the total US population.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases as a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please telephone, or send telegrams/faxes/express and airmail letters in English, if possible, or in your own language:**

- expressing concern that Dana Edmonds is scheduled to be executed on January 24 1994;
- urging Governor Allen to commute Dana Edmonds' death sentence.

**APPEALS TO**

The Honourable George Allen  
Governor of Virginia  
State Capital

Richmond, VA 23219, USA

**Telegrams: Governor George Allen, Richmond, VA 23219**

**Telephone: +1 804 786 2211**

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**Salutation: Dear Governor**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

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and to diplomatic representatives of the USA accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.**