

25 July 1997

Further information on EXTRA 182 /96 (AMR 51/95/96, 22 November 1996) and follow-ups (AMR 51/103/96, 19 December 1996 and AMR 51/36/97, 27 June 1997)

Death Penalty

USA (VIRGINIA)

Joseph O'Dell

---

Amnesty International very much regrets that Joseph O'Dell, 55, was executed by lethal injection as scheduled in Virginia on 23 July 1997. The execution was completed at 9:16pm (01:16 GMT) just eight hours after O'Dell married his volunteer paralegal, Lori Urs. "Today was the happiest day of my life when I married my wife," said O'Dell.

About an hour before the execution, the Supreme Court turned down an appeal by O'Dell's lawyers to stay the execution by refusing to allow new DNA tests. Results of DNA tests on blood found on O'Dell's clothes carried out for the defence after sentencing contradict serology tests carried out by the prosecution at trial which linked O'Dell to the crime.

In his final statement, O'Dell wanted the following to be said to the victim's son: "Eddie, I did not kill your mother." He also addressed Governor Allen when he said: "... you're killing an innocent man."

Press sources claim that Governor Allen had received appeals from Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa and the European Parliament, among others.

Thank you to everyone who sent appeals on Joseph O'Dell's behalf. Letters expressing regret at the execution may be sent to the authorities listed in the original action.