

24 September 1999

**Further information on UA 220/99 (AMR 51/135/99, 26 August 1999) - Death penalty / Legal concern****USA (Delaware) Willie G. Sullivan, African American, aged 28**

Willie Sullivan was executed in Delaware in the early hours of 24 September 1999. He had been sentenced to death in December 1992 for the robbery and murder of 78-year-old Maurice Dodd a year earlier.

Amnesty International has been informed that in his final statement Willie Sullivan expressed remorse to Maurice Dodd's relatives, but claimed that he "should not be the person who is lying here". Since his arrest in 1992, he had never denied that he was present at the murder, and according to his post-conviction lawyers had always been remorseful about what happened to Maurice Dodd, but consistently maintained that he was not the person who carried out the stabbing (which was the cause of death).

The Board of Pardons had refused clemency after a three-hour hearing on 21 September in which they heard evidence of Willie Sullivan's mental retardation and fetal alcohol syndrome (see original UA). During the hearing, Willie Sullivan's mother pleaded for her son's life, noting that she had drunk alcohol continuously while pregnant with him. She broke down in distress and was led from the hearing.

At the hearing, Willie Sullivan's defence attorneys produced an affidavit from the state Attorney General at the time of the murder. He wrote that if he had had all the facts concerning Willie Sullivan's limited mental capacity at his disposal, he would have looked at the case more closely to see whether the state should pursue the death penalty.

Willie Sullivan's final appeal to the US Supreme Court was denied about 30 minutes before his execution was due to begin.

Earlier, the local press had reported that "a huge letter writing campaign has been inundating local newspapers and government officials on behalf of the condemned killer... Hundreds of letters have been pouring into Delaware from as far away as Germany and Austria, most by those who support or who are involved with Amnesty International... Most of the letters express pure opposition to killing Sullivan for his crime. Others express concern over the death penalty being issued to a person who has a tested IQ of 70 and is considered borderline mentally retarded." The article quoted from a letter sent from Neustadt, Austria, and signed by 31 people: "Though we of course don't excuse this horrible crime, we cannot agree with the cruel, inhuman and degrading kind of punishment, as the death penalty is."

Willie Sullivan's lawyers have expressed their thanks to Amnesty International for the organization's involvement in this case, and have said that Willie Sullivan himself was very appreciative of the fact that there were people around the world who were taking action on his behalf.

Willie Sullivan becomes the 75<sup>th</sup> prisoner put to death in the USA in 1999, more than in any other year since the USA resumed judicial killing in January 1977. The country has executed 575 prisoners since that date.

2

No further action by the UA Network is requested. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.