EXTERNAL **AI Index: AMR 51/55/96**

EXTRA 101/96 **Death Penalty** **5 July 1996**

USA (Virginia)Joseph Savino

Joseph Savino is scheduled to be executed in Virginia on 17 July 1996. He was sentenced to death in November 1988 for the murder of Thos McWaters, his male lover.

Health experts have concluded that Joseph Savino, who has a long history of drug abuse, was suffering from cocaine psychosis at the time he committed the crime. The murder was made a capital offence because Savino stole items from McWaters. However, Savino alleges that the robbery happened after the murder and was not the motive.

According to reports received by Amnesty International, Savino was sexually abused as a child. It is alleged that Thos McWaters became possessive and that "the demands for sex from Thos McWaters became overwhelming and unbearable" and led him to the murder.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

As of 30 April 1996 there were 54 prisoners under sentence of death in Virginia. Thirty-two prisoners have been executed in the state under its present death penalty laws. The most recent person to be executed in Virginia was Richard Townes, on 16 January 1996. On 1 July 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 Governor has sole authority to grant commutations. He can act independently although the recommendation from the Board of Pardons and Paroles is normally needed before the Governor will consider granting clemency.

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 send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:
- expressing deep concern that Joseph Savino is scheduled to be executed on 17 July 1996;
- urging Governor Allen to commute Joseph Savino's death sentence;
- explaining your opposition to the death penalty in all cases.

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
Faxes: +1 804 371 6351
Salutation: Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

The Letters Editor
Richmond Times-Dispatch
Box 85333, Richmond, VA 23293, USA
Faxes: +1 804 775 8019

and to diplomatic representatives of USA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.