

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AMR 51/103/96

19 December 1996

Further information on EXTRA 182/96 (AMR 51/95/96, 22 November 1996) - Death Penalty

USA (VIRGINIA)

Joseph O'Dell

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Joseph O'Dell, who was scheduled to be executed on 18 December 1996, has received a stay of execution. The stay will allow the examination of new DNA evidence that casts doubt on his murder conviction.

Joseph O'Dell told "Il Giornale", an Italian newspaper, *"I am terrified. I don't deserve to die because I am innocent... it is nice all the same to know that I won't be dying alone like the other people in this death house where they go to their execution in silence."*

The case of Joseph O'Dell has aroused considerable interest and has prompted some vigorous campaigning against the death penalty in the United States and abroad. A wide range of non-governmental organizations and government authorities have appealed to the Governor of Virginia on O'Dell's behalf, including Italian president Oscar Luigi Scalfaro and Pope John Paul. Italy's lower house of parliament voted by 399 to three, with 13 abstentions, in support of a resolution requesting the Italian government to intervene on behalf of O'Dell.

The Italian Prime Minister, Romano Prodi, wrote a letter to Governor George Allen and was quoted by the press as saying, *"I am appealing to you personally to consider the possibility of suspending the execution fixed for December 18 to allow new elements announced by the O'Dell defence to be examined. You will understand that whatever decision you make will cause great emotion among the public in my country."*

Thank you to all those who sent appeals on behalf of Joseph O'Dell. No further appeals are required by the Urgent Action Network at present.