

**For Immediate Release**

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**MURDER VICTIMS' FAMILY MEMBERS, DEATH ROW EXONEREES  
TO GATHER FOR NATIONAL ANTI-DEATH PENALTY CONFERENCE***San Jose, January 17-20, 2008*

San Jose, CA – Murder victims' family members, family members of those on death row, and death row exonerees from California and across the United States will be among those gathering in San Jose this week for the preeminent national meeting of anti-death penalty advocates. The conference, which begins Thursday, will bring together victims' family members opposed to the death penalty with the New Jersey legislator who helped repeal the death penalty in his state.

*NCADP 2008: Reaching for the Dream*, the annual conference of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, co-hosted this year by the California-based organization Death Penalty Focus, comes at a time when legislators, policy-makers, and survivors of murder victims themselves are rethinking their support for capital punishment. Last month, New Jersey repealed the death penalty after district attorneys, law enforcement officials and murder victims' family members testified against it.

"This conference represents an extraordinary gathering of voices rising up against the death penalty," said Diann Rust-Tierney, Executive Director of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. "Family members of victims have come to oppose the death penalty for many reasons. Some feel the unwieldy, drawn-out process keeps them from reaching closure. Others would like the millions currently spent on the death penalty redirected towards programs aimed at apprehending the perpetrators who took the lives of their loved ones."

The conference comes just after the first hearing on the death penalty held by the California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice, tasked with investigating the causes of wrongful conviction and wrongful executions. This hearing revealed deep, systemic flaws in California's death penalty that will require millions of dollars in reforms. Several members of California Crime Victims for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, a coalition of loved ones of murder victims, shared their stories with the Commission and asked them to spend that money on solving more crimes and helping victims instead. To view the stories of these families, visit [www.californiacrimevictims.org](http://www.californiacrimevictims.org).

Lance Lindsey, Executive Director of Death Penalty Focus, said, "Recent developments in New Jersey and in our own state have shown us that the tide of public opinion is turning on the death penalty. Americans now realize that the death penalty experiment has failed; it's costly, ineffective and too carelessly applied. This is why a majority of Americans now prefer a sentence of life without parole over the death penalty."

To obtain media credentials to cover the event, please contact NCADP Communications Director David Elliot at 202-607-7036. The conference will take place that Holiday Inn, 1740 North 1<sup>st</sup> St., San Jose, 95112.

Elliot can also arrange interviews with:

- The families of murder victims. To view the stories of these families, visit [www.californiacrimevictims.org](http://www.californiacrimevictims.org).
- Juan Melendez, who, after spending 17 years on Florida's death row, became the nation's 99<sup>th</sup> death row exoneree.
- California award recipients including Stefanie Faucher, Program Director of Death Penalty Focus; Natasha Minsker, Death Penalty Policy Director, ACLU of Northern California; and Elisabeth Semel, director of the death penalty clinic at UC Berkeley's Boalt Hall School of Law.

Newsmaker events:

- **12:30-1:30 p.m., Friday, Jan. 18:** Lunch with New Jersey State Sen. Ray Lesniak, who sponsored the bill replacing New Jersey's death penalty statutes with death in prison.
- **1:45-2:45 p.m., Friday, Jan. 18:** Panel presentation, "The Power of Innocence," featuring Juan Melendez, the nation's 99<sup>th</sup> death row exoneree.