

# More than 2,000 protest in St. Peter's Square

ROME – More than 2,000 people protesting capital punishment marched through Rome to St. Peter's Square on Easter morning.

The Easter March, as it was called, was designed to put pressure on the Italian government to propose a moratorium on capital punishment at the U.N. General Assembly April 23. The April 8 march was organized by the Sant'Egidio Community, a Catholic lay community, and Hands Off Cain, an international nonprofit organization that works to end capital punishment.

Various Italian political figures – including Rome Mayor Walter Veltroni and Marco Pannella, a member of the European Parliament – participated in the march. Pannella, founder of Italy's Radical Party, had been on a hunger strike since March 21 to push the Italian government to take action against capital punishment.

The marchers arrived in St. Peter's Square just moments before Pope Benedict XVI delivered his blessing “urbi et orbi” (to the city of Rome and to the world) in which he lamented the wars, disasters and horrors that plague the world today. The pope also expressed his concern for all those who suffer from exploitation, hunger, disease and terrorism.

Some march participants, who held banners in the square, were disappointed that the pope did not recognize them in his greeting and did not speak about capital punishment.

However, Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi sent a message to the organizers of the march saying the Italian government is fighting hard to make the death penalty moratorium a reality, despite several challenges.

“There are still many obstacles, significant obstacles because, among the powerful nations of the world, some still use capital punishment regularly and react to any potential changes,” he said.

The United States, China, Japan, Cuba and Iraq are among the 69 countries that use

capital punishment.