

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | August 18, 2013

It is day 41 of the California prison hunger strike, with 129 hunger strikers in six prisons across the state, with 69 of them having refused food since July 8th. As of this writing, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has refused to enter negotiations with the hunger strikers, and Governor Jerry Brown has still not commented on the hunger strike.

In the third statewide hunger strike since June 2011, hunger strikers are [demanding](#) an end to long-term solitary confinement, nutritious food, productive programming, a reform to the process that places thousands in the Security Housing Unit (SHU), and an end to group punishment. The epicenter of the hunger strike is Pelican Bay State Prison in Crescent City, where over 500 prisoners have been held in solitary confinement for over 10 years.

There are four official SHU facilities across the state of California; approximately 3,000 prisoners are currently segregated for being deemed members or associates of prison gangs. Many are held in solitary confinement; while others are forced to share cells in 812 cells designed for one.

According to data from June, 1,732 of the 3,835 SHU prisoners at the four prisons with SHU facilities are single-celled.

The following is the institutional breakdown:

The hunger strike has seen fluctuating participation the past week:

The California Office of the Receiver has confirmed various transports of hunger strikers to facilities with better medical facilities than Pelican Bay. According to a friend of one hunger striker, Pelican Bay strikers were transported to the ASU at California State Prison, Sacramento.

A letter dated August 14th from hunger strike leader Arturo Castellanos, [published](#) by the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity coalition, indicates that he and other hunger strike leaders remain in the Administrative Segregation Unit (ASU) at Pelican Bay.

He writes of the bleak situation in the ASU cells and the medical transports:

Being in these cells for just 30 days, I can fully understand why they committed suicide. They are truly oppressive and constitute very depressing conditions. Suicide? Hell yes! Especially for those men and women who receive SHU terms of indefinite SHU and have to wait in these depressing cells for six months to two years until a cell opens up in SHU for them. Our attorneys are requesting that the Coleman attorneys, who are also our attorneys, file a motion in the court to order CDCR to immediately close and stop housing men and women prisoners in these unfinished ASU cells until they fully renovate them.

This is our 38th day on our no solid food, no dairy product hunger strike that we started on July 8, 2013. Of the 66 SHU prisoners who were moved here from both C and D facilities [SHU units], 25 have been transferred to the Sacramento Medical Center at New Folsom Prison. Some of those are in the hospital. They were volunteers who, even though they had serious chronic illnesses, still went on hunger strike and are now on high medical risk status.

They still remain on hunger strike, even though some of them are already being force fed through an IV. The rest of us remain here until we also become high medical risks and are transferred or until the CDCR comes half way in the negotiations with our attorneys and comes to a fair settlement agreement.

In a letter also [published](#) by the coalition, from hunger strike leader Sitawa Nantambu Jamaa, Jamaa writes about the steps they've taken to contribute to positive change in the prison system. He refers to the August 2012 Agreement to End All Hostilities that several Pelican Bay SHU prisoners representing Black, White, Northern and Southern Hispanic inmates signed on to calling on all inmates across the state to end racially motivated violence. He accuses CDCR of obstructing these efforts

He also reiterates the motives of the hunger strikers. For decades, California prisoners deemed members or associates of certain prison gangs and placed on indefinite terms in the SHU could only get out of the SHU by either maxing out of their sentence, debrief (or, snitch) on their gang, or die.

On this, Jamaa writes:

We realize that the justification for locking men and women away in solitary confinement on prison gang validations indefinitely while also subjecting us to a military debriefing process as the only way to program out constitute attacks to our physical and psychological well-being. Prisoners can no longer withstand such torture.

This process has led to many debriefings and mentally ill prisoners throughout CDCR: in PBSP-SHU, Corcoran SHU, Tehachapi SHU, Folsom SHU and San Quentin Adjustment Center (Death Row). As people who have suffered under such a brutal, diabolical system, we realize that it is our responsibility to help change the course of violent prison systems that have made their way to our communities.

On this point, CDCR has repeatedly claimed that it has already addressed this concern through its reformed SHU and gang validation system. Since October, it has begun case-by-case reviews of all 3,000 prisoners placed in segregation units for gang affiliation to determine whether or not they should be released from the SHU or placed in a Step Down Program. The Step Down Program would hypothetically allow prisoners to leave the SHU within 5 years without engaging in debriefing, a claim that hunger strikers are highly skeptical of.

In a Friday [press release](#), CDCR has described the status of these reviews:

Currently, due to the demands on staff, CDCR is conducting case-by-case reviews of validated prison gang members and associates only in institutions that have no inmates participating in the hunger strike. As of August 12, 425 reviews have been completed systemwide; 268 validated inmates have either been transferred or are approved for transfer to a general population facility and 125 inmates were placed in various phases of the Step-Down Program, an incentive-based, multi-step program that provides graduated housing, enhanced programs, interpersonal interactions and increased privileges for validated inmates who refrain from criminal gang behavior.

Solitary Watch endeavors to provide regular updates on the hunger strike. If you have received information from a current or former hunger striker, please contact the author: Sal.Solitary@Gmail.com

Sal Rodriguez was Solitary Watch's first and most prolific intern. Based in Los Angeles, he served as an editorial writer and columnist for the Orange County Register and the Press-Enterprise, and is now the opinion editor for the Southern California News Group.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

Solitary Watch encourages comments and welcomes a range of ideas, opinions, debates, and respectful disagreement. We do not allow name-calling, bullying, cursing, or personal attacks of any kind. Any embedded links should be to information relevant to the conversation. Comments that violate these guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders will be blocked. Thank you for your cooperation.

For everyone else:

For every man that lives without freedom, the rest of us must face the guilt.

1941 Watch on the Rhine act 2: written by Lillian Hellman

To the CDCR:

You can't hold a man down without staying down with him.
Attributed to Booker T. Washington

A reply from someone who knows Todd Ashker.

http://www.laprogressive.com/todd-ashker-hunger-strike/?utm_content=buffer5302c&utm_source=buffer&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=Buffer

To the inmates on hunger strike:

In all things that are purely social we (black and white) can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.

Booker T. Washington

Speech at the Cotton states and International Exposition, Atlanta September 18, 1895.

Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time; the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence.

Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.

Martin Luther King in a speech on December 11, 1964, upon accepting his Noble Prize

To those who do not make it take inspiration from these words:

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. I just want to do gods will So Im happy tonight. Im not worried about anything. Im not fearing any man.

MLKs address to sanitation workers, Memphis, TN April 3, 1968, the night before his assassination.

EMPATHY AT PELICAN BAY by k kissel

The pain of days peaks, the reality of pity speaks. Uncertainties rage and without anything to count on, we must endure and turn the page?

Sadly everything has become only memories, of what I thought was? But it is not meant to be why couldnt I have known? How did they fail to see? because of my poor choices, I have been stripped of my humanity by the powers that be? Locked away, so all ALONE, without human touch, and no chance of using even a telephone? This is nothing more than a torture chamber and a turn for the worse, my life has taken, landing me here in the Pelican Bay SHUE? Too much of nothing can never be something and waiting becomes the hardest part. Wishing leaves you wondering, which will never be knowing. Waylaid and without? Where to start? Who to believe? Leery and lost, justice is uncertain and life has become water in a glass? Would my fellow man find me? Because where I am is where NO ONE would want to be?

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