

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/07/21/statements-from-human-rights-and-civil-rights-groups-support-pelican-bay-hunger-strikers/>

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | July 21, 2011

After three weeks, hundreds of California inmates are still participating in a hunger strike that at one point spanned thirteen prisons and 6,600 prisoners. The most resolute participants appear to be concentrated in the Security Housing Unit at Pelican Bay State Prison, where the hunger strike began, and in the SHUs at Corcoran and Tehachapi. Many hunger strikers are weakening and have lost [more than 20 pounds](#). Prison officials are moving to [force feed](#) the strikers rather than consider their [five core demands](#) for constructive programming, nutritious food, a reduction in the use of solitary confinement, and changes to the highly fallible system by which inmates are condemned to the SHUs.

Several human rights and civil rights organizations have now made statements on the hunger strike, supporting the prisoners' efforts to bring a modicum of humanity to the SHUs and urging the state of California to engage in good faith negotiations.

Rev. Richard Killmer, Executive Director of the **National Religious Campaign Against Torture**, released the following [statement](#) on July 15. NRCAT is also hosting [a petition](#) for people of faith urging an end to prolonged solitary confinement:

Hunger strikes are the last resort of prisoners protesting inhumane confinement conditions. We have seen prisoners protest their treatment in this manner at Guantanamo Bay, and now inmates at Pelican Bay State Prison in northern California among various other prisons in California are taking similar drastic measures. At Pelican Bay, hundreds of prisoners are held in prolonged solitary confinement, a practice that qualifies as torture due to its destructive physical and psychological effects on human beings. Conditions are so bad in California, these inmates prefer to starve themselves possibly to death rather than live another week in prolonged solitary confinement.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture vehemently believes that even those convicted of crimes are human beings with inherent dignity and worth, and they deserve humane treatment. NRCAT is a coalition of religious organizations committed to ending torture sponsored or enabled by federal or state government in the United States. Our members' moral convictions and our commitments to international and constitutional protections against cruel and inhumane treatment require that we call on the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to respond to the prisoners' reasonable demands, put an end to its egregious use of prolonged solitary confinement, and take immediate steps to improve the conditions in California's prisons.

The **American Civil Liberties Union of California** issued the following [statement](#) on July 19.

The ACLU of California supports the striking prisoners' demands to end cruel and inhumane conditions in the Security Housing Unit (SHU) at Pelican Bay State Prison. These conditions include prolonged, solitary confinement in small, windowless concrete boxes with little to no human interaction and other severe physical deprivations.

Not only are such conditions inhumane and harmful, but they also jeopardize public safety. Solitary confinement causes and exacerbates mental illness, and prisoners who are subjected to such extreme isolation cannot properly reintegrate into society, resulting in higher recidivism rates.

An alarming number of prisoners are released directly from secure housing units into the community. The CDCR must implement policies that enhance safety both within prisons and within our communities. Current practices do not achieve these equally important goals.

The ACLU calls on the State to re-double its efforts to engage in meaningful negotiations with the strikers to bring the hunger strike to a swift and peaceful conclusion. In addition, the ACLU calls on Governor Brown and CDCR Secretary, Matthew Cate, to significantly curtail the use of the SHU at Pelican Bay and other California prisons and to provide all prisoners confined to the SHU with items, services, and programs necessary for psychological and physical well-being including warm clothing, out-of-cell time, and participation in rehabilitative programs.

The **Center for Constitutional Rights** released the following [statement](#) on July 19:

The Center for Constitutional Rights is in full support of the hunger strikers at the Pelican Bay Security Housing Unit (SHU) and the thousands of other prisoners who are striking in solidarity. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) must comply with the strikers five core demands, and CCR agrees that the treatment of the prisoners amounts to serious violations of the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).

CCR has been defending the rights of men detained at Guantanamo Bay since 2002. We are all too aware of the effects of long-term confinement and isolation, the lack of decent food and sunlight, the absence of human contact, the deprivation, and the ultimate dehumanization that results from such treatment. Immediate action by the CDCR can avert any additional suffering and other possible consequences.

CCR stands with all of the other activists and organizations who have expressed their solidarity, and we will provide assistance in any way we are able to pressure California authorities and help urge others to take action.

The **Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity** coalition, formed expressly to support the California hunger strikers, urges individuals to become involved, and has released the following 10 Ways to support the strike:

1. [Sign the online petition](#)
2. Send this info to friends *See info below*
3. Keep yourself informed! Subscribe to this blog by check our [home page](#) and clicking subscribe me on the right-hand side.
4. Attend events, demonstrations and actions. [Click Here for more info on demos and actions in the US and Canada!](#)
5. Organize a solidarity demonstration or action. [Click Here for some suggestions on solidarity actions, demos and events](#)
6. Urge CDCR and *California elected officials* to honor the prisoners demands. [Click Here for a list of officials and their phone numbers.](#)
7. Write to everyone you know locked up in prison and let them know about the hunger strike and the many ways thousands of people outside and inside prison are supporting it. (Since mail referring to the hunger strike is being rejected, we find it helpful to be clever with language, and to describe this action as best you can without using the exact words hunger strike to increase the chances of the letters getting through.)
8. [Write to the strike leaders](#) at Pelican Bay and send them your words of encouragement and support! Click [here](#) for contact info.
9. [Donate](#) to Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity through [California Prison Focus's paypal](#) and identify your donation by writing hunger strike or pelican bay. Donations will be used for mass mailings to prisoners, flyers, posters, and rides to the prisons for advocates and families members.
10. Support Media Work:



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

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