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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/02/23/family-of-california-prisoner-who-died-on-hunger-strike-speaks-out/>

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | February 23, 2012

The family of Christian Gomez, the 27-year-old prisoner who died while on hunger strike at California's Corcoran State Prison, is speaking out about the loss of their family member in the hope that similar incidents in the future are avoided.

In a phone call with Solitary Watch, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation spokesperson Terry Thornton confirmed that Gomez had been placed in solitary confinement in the Administrative Segregation Unit (ASU) pending investigation of assault on another inmate with a weapon on January 14, 2012. Thornton would not confirm the status of this investigation. Gomez was serving a life sentence for first degree murder and attempted murder.

Christian Gomez had not told his family members of his intentions to participate in the January 27-February 13 hunger strike held by ASU inmates [in protest](#) of their conditions. According to an interview with Gomez's sister, Y.L., she found out when the coroner Tom [Edmonds] implied that there was a possibility of a chemical imbalance due to a hunger strike he was participating in. That's the first I heard of this. Back in [\[September or October\]](#) when he first was transferred there he did tell me that they were having a hunger strike to fight for their rights but he was in general population.

Contrary to [earlier reports](#) that he had only been on a hunger strike for four days when he died, Terry Thornton confirmed to Solitary Watch that Gomez joined the strike on January 27 with 31 other inmates. This means that he had been on hunger strike for a week at the time of his death.

The family says that Gomez had high blood pressure, thyroid and kidney problems. According to Y.L., before being sent to Corcoran he had been incarcerated at High Desert State Prison for four years. He told me things were a lot different at this prison and that he didn't receive the same medical attention he received over at high desert, said Y.L.

Gomez was found unresponsive in his cell at an unconfirmed time on February 2. [Reports from other inmates](#) indicate that they had pounded on their cell doors and screamed to get the attention of the correctional staff to order aivan officers. He was declared dead at Corcoran District Hospital at 12:22 PM.



According to Y.L., My mother received the call of my brother's death on Thursday February 2, 2012 at approximately 1pm. She then called me hysterically and that's when I went over to her house. When I got there I asked her who called and she said someone from the prison. [I] asked her if they gave her a number where we could call to obtain more info and she said no. They told her that she would receive a letter in the mail explaining everything and where we could claim the body. I was so upset that things were being handled this way, for God sake we were talking about a human being not an animal.

Asked how she would like people to remember her brother, Y.L. responded, he was a genuine person that had not lost hope in the system.

He knew that he would eventually get out. Although he had made bad choices in who he hung around with he didn't murder anyone. The witnesses in his case never identified him on the contrary, but yet he was still convicted. Unfortunately we couldn't afford a good attorney and he got screwed. He was very caring with his family and friends and therefore he will be greatly missed by those who knew him. He had matured a lot in prison and can be remembered by those who knew him as a prankster. There was never a dull moment with him. He always had a big smile when we visited him and never discussed how bad things were in there to not worry us. He always said he was fine. Even in the last letter he wrote on Jan 30th which my mom received on Feb 3rd he wrote that he was fine.

Update, February 24: Yajaira Lopez (Y.L.), sister of Christian Gomez, appeared on Democracy Now! this morning to talk about her brother's life and death. Democracy Now! also interviewed Carol Strickland of the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition and Prisoners With Children, as well as Terry Thornton of the CDCR.

[youtube=<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJS4cUCiZO0>]

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.

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September 29, 2022

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Sounds like when he got to California is when he really started getting treated badly. California is the most racist and uncaring state of any kind in the world. Truly sick.

My nephew was killed in Corcoran on Jan 19, 2012. He was in the courtyard when a man that was in for murder struck him in the head. My nephew received a head injury and was pronounced dead on Jan. 22, 2012. He never regained consciousness. My brother (his father and his mother?) received a call from the hospital wanting to know if they wanted to donate their son's organs. That was how they heard of his death. My brother died of a heart attack just one day before he was able to bury his son. What's wrong with the state of CA? They do not think inmates are human beings. Why is the state not doing something for these inmates and listening to their cries for help. My heart goes out to this family and all the families of those who have been through this horror. Now my sister-in-law has lost her son and husband within a little more than a week of each other. My nephew wrote to his mom stating this place is going, and something is going to happen. The inmate who killed him was in for murder, my nephew for not violent crimes, no crimes against persons. He had a problem with drugs and had too many theft charges. CA three strikes and your out. Now my nephew is truly OUT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

First he got convicted of First degree murder? and attempted murder right? so he gets life in prison, in prison in general population you have a lot of privileges, you can buy a tv, radio, canteen 15 phone calls to your loved ones, you get a job, you have access to the yard very rare do you spend time in your cell unless its count time, the only time you're in a cell is lock down, everyone knows if you commit a crime in prison you go to ad-seg then the SHU, you lose all the privileges of general population, so what are they protesting? a phone call? a benie

My condolences to your family.

When a person or human being is incarcerated and imprisoned, they are marginalized and categorized by the system [all systems] that operates with one key ~ mass incarceration for profit and control. The legislative bodies of these states need to open their eyes and realize that their constituents, yes, the prisoners' families are traumatized and deeply impacted by what happens to their sons and daughters and must seek reforms to bring back the humanity into being a human being. Solitary confinement stripped away at the flesh and mind leaving less than a human over time and that's unacceptable. Solitary confinement is used for punishment on top of punishment and that is harsh and toxic to the person's ability to survive such torture.

Society has to stand up and bring back the sensitivity that has been lost and restore the system's accountability how they treat prisoners and how they incarcerate these masses. It's time for recall petitions of those who embrace mass incarceration and that will change the direction we have been in for the last decades steered by those who wanted to be tough on crime but never wanted to fund it properly and include the essential services to maintain dignity and sanity to the concept. Solitary Watch is on the right track with their updates on hunger strikes, tragedies related to such acts and the mismanagement of special management units, administrative segregation units and the condoning of abuse, neglect and torture within these specialized units out of sight and out of mind for many who do not have family inside prisons. Share your thoughts with neighbors, church members, reporters, legislators, candidates for public office and awaken their conscience as these people in prisons are suffering needlessly and stressing with a live or die environment surrounding them.

We also have a love on in Corcoran, as much as I love to receive letter from him I hate to hear about the stress his body is going through. But all I can do is show my love and pray for him. To all the ones ;STAY UP N GOD BLESS U ALL.

I am really sorry to hear that

No words can be said, except compassion for the family. Stay together and stay strong

My condolences go out to your family. This is a very sad story. My son is in prison as well and he does say that he is fine when I visit or talk to him and I know he's just saying that to make feel better. God bless them all.

Regards

Diane

So sorry for your loss you will see him again in heaven a better place

Reblogged this on pastproduction.

That's hell a sad and my condolences go out to his family. I hope this is a wake up call to the prison system that no matter what the crime of a person, they are still human and have rights too

The prisoners are fighting the best way they can, to bring attention to horrific abusive prison conditions, like going on hunger strikes~I do not believe they should be going on hunger strikes, guards & administration do not care if they die. If they cared anything about prisoners, they would have strong accountability consequences for rogue guards, there is no accountability~~~~I strongly believe the families & friends are the ones who NEED 2 be fighting for their loved ones, on the outside, so they do not have to sacrifice themselves to hunger strikes~~ but they do because of their desperation, their cries fall upon deaf ears~~filing complaints to administration, is similar to filing their own death sentence, guards retaliate with the blessings of the lame counselors~~

Scary but truthful ~~ the amount of neglect abuse and torture goes undetected as the admin remains in denial such conditions occur or exist within their walls of confinement. I have worked many years around such conditions and had to put pressure on medical and mental health providers to receive minimal treatment levels and care. I hate to say this about a system that I worked for so long but it has deep chasms of neglect and nobody finds out about them until someone dies needlessly and most likely a preventable death to begin with. These persons are humans in need of treatment and intervention; once they accept the fact solitary confinement has its limitations, they should curb the placement for last resorts, shorten the terms kept there and provide daily medical and mental health treatment, intervention and realistic services to maintain a therapeutic environment rather than the current punitive and harsh treatment imposed today in many states and federal prisons.

My brother is in ASU and he knew Christian. He and other inmates are soooooo sorry this happened to him. I remember seeing him during visiting. Prayers go out to his whole family!!

This is so sad. My sympathy goes out to the family. Those incarcerated still deserve to be treated like human beings. They deserve decent meals and medical care. If the govt. can't deliver on this then they need to find another way. I know of one person in solitary that on the weekends they only feed them tuna and crackers TWICE and an apple. This is not healthy. There are not enough words to explain away this horrible situation. Prayers for the family.

This is so scary. I believe this is not atypical of the treatment inmates/patients receive in the majority of our state prisons. Officers often ignore the inmates when they shout out for help or for whatever they may need. This is so disgusting. My heart and prayers to the family of Christian Gomez. My son is in solitary also.

I also have a son in a Supermax prison and he is in solitary confinement 24/7. My heart and prayers go out to this family. This system is insane and needs to be stopped.

This is so hard to believe, I have a son this age who is also in solitary confinement, and knowing if this happened to him on a hunger strike would be so hard to comprehend. I feel for this family so much. This system really needs to change. We all need to do our part to help the ones who are suffering in this hell hole. Right now..I'm just lost for words. I pray for the family, and prisoners who have to deal with this situation.

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