

# National Religious Campaign Against Torture

## Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

**<http://www.nrcat.org/about/nrcat-press-releases/1173-call-for-investigation-into-reports-of-torture-at-the-lewisburg-federal-penitentiary>**

## Public Facing Advocacy Writing

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** November 28, 2016

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### **Religious and Civil Rights Organizations Call for Investigation into Reports of Torture at the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary** *Letter Follows Recent Media Reports of Systemic Abuse and Violence*

**Washington, DC** Today, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) joined nearly forty civil and human rights organizations, mental health and religious organizations, including the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the American Civil Liberties Union, and the National Association of Social Workers, in urging the Attorney General to request the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General launch an investigation into the federal Bureau of Prisons practices at the Lewisburg federal penitentiary.

[The letter to the Attorney General](#) follows recent media reports published by NPR and The Marshall Project uncovering allegations of torture at USP Lewisburg, including the use of prolonged double-celled solitary confinement, restraints, and lack of mental health treatment. The letter states that these reports mirror years of troubling complaints at this federal facility, and calls for greater oversight, transparency and accountability to ensure humane and lawful conditions of confinement.

Rev. Laura Markle Downton, NRCAT's Director of U.S. Prisons Policy and Program, stated, Prolonged isolated confinement has been defined as torture by the United Nations and is widely opposed by medical and mental health professionals and leading corrections officials. The National Religious Campaign Against Torture has mobilized people of faith to oppose solitary confinement for many years. With bipartisan momentum building at the state-level for humane alternatives to restrictive housing, reported conditions at USP Lewisburg call for swift intervention and accountability.

The full letter delivered to the Department of Justice today follows:

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November 28, 2016

Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Madam Attorney General Lynch,

As representatives of civil and human rights organizations, mental health and religious organizations, we write to urge you to request the Department of Justice Office of Inspector General launch an investigation into the federal Bureau of Prisons practices at the Lewisburg federal penitentiary, including the use of double-celled solitary confinement, restraints, and lack of mental health treatment.

Recent media reports published by NPR and The Marshall Project have uncovered harrowing allegations of abuse and torture at USP Lewisburg.<sup>[1]</sup> These investigative reports mirror years of troubling complaints at this federal facility where incarcerated people have stated that they are routinely forced to face double-celled solitary confinement in a 610 ft cell for nearly 24 hours a day with a potentially dangerous or mentally unstable cell mate. Others, who refuse a cell assignment because they fear the individual who will be locked down with them, report being shackled in painful restraints for hours and even days at a time as punishment for refusing dangerous housing.

Since 2009, at least four incarcerated people at Lewisburg have been killed by their cellmates, and the rate of assault there is six times higher than federal prisons overall. Media reports reveal officers responded to roughly 300 fights with cuffs and pepper spray. Incarcerated people have suffered from injuries including broken ribs and stab wounds: such evidence of profound and systemic use of devices of torture call for investigation and intervention.<sup>[2]</sup> By any measure, this is a facility in crisis that requires greater oversight, transparency and accountability to ensure humane and lawful conditions of confinement.

We applaud your tremendous leadership in addressing the use of restrictive housing in United States prisons and urge swift action in response to these disturbing reports.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers In Action (AAMIA)  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Friends Service Committee  
Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America  
Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice  
Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement (CAIC)  
Center for Children's Law and Policy  
Communion of Synodal Catholic Churches  
Disciples Center for Public Witness  
Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
Exodus Foundation.org  
Fig Tree Revolution  
First Congregational Church of East Hartford, United Church of Christ  
Franciscan Action Network  
Healing Communities USA  
Human Rights Defense Center  
Human Rights Watch  
Interfaith Action for Human Rights  
Lewisburg Prison Project  
NAMI NYS  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Center for Lesbian Rights  
National Council of Churches  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Religious Campaign Against Torture  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project  
Solitary Gardens  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries  
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society  
Uptown People's Law Center  
Western New York Peace Center

cc: Michael E. Horowitz, Inspector General for the Department of Justice

1. "Inside Lewisburg Prison: A Choice Between A Violent Cellmate Or Shackles," Published October 26, 2016. Reported by Christie Thompson of The Marshall Project and Joseph Shapiro, NPR News Investigations correspondent. Source: <http://www.npr.org/2016/10/26/498582706/inside-lewisburg-prison-a-choice-between-a-violent-cellmate-or-shackles>
2. Ibid.

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*The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) is a membership organization committed to ending U.S.-sponsored torture, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Since its formation in January 2006, more than 300 religious organizations have joined NRCAT, including representatives from the Catholic, evangelical Christian, mainline Protestant, Unitarian Universalist, Quaker, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Bahai, Buddhist, and Sikh communities. Members include national denominations and faith groups, regional organizations and local congregations.*

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