

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/10/19/un-torture-investigator-calls-on-nations-to-end-solitary-confinement/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | October 19, 2011



The UN torture investigator, Juan Mendez, yesterday called on UN member nations to ban nearly all uses of solitary confinement in prisons, warning that it causes serious mental and physical harm and often amounts to torture. Juan Mendez, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment, [presented](#) a written report on solitary confinement to the UN General Assembly's Human Rights Committee, which singled out for criticism the routine use of supermax isolation in the United States. He also gave a press conference and [participated in a forum](#) with American civil rights and human rights groups.

As [Reuters](#) reports, Mendez stated that solitary confinement can amount to torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment when used as a punishment, during pretrial detention, indefinitely or for a prolonged period, for persons with mental disabilities or juveniles.' He continued, Segregation, isolation, separation, cellular, lockdown, supermax, the hole, secure housing unit whatever the name, solitary confinement should be banned by states as a punishment or extortion (of information) technique.'

Mendez was precise in defining solitary confinement, and in outlining the limitations that should be placed on its use. He [stated](#):

I am of the view that juveniles, given their physical and mental immaturity, should never be subjected to solitary confinement. Equally, in order not to exacerbate a previously existing mental condition, individuals with mental disabilities should be provided with proper medical or psychiatric care and under no circumstances should they ever be subjected to solitary confinement. My recommendations are, first, to see if we can have a complete ban on prolonged or indefinite solitary confinement. And I more or less arbitrarily defined that as anything beyond 15 days of solitary confinement, meaning someone being confined to a cell for at least 22 hours a day.

As Reuters reports, Mendez told reporters he conceded that short-term solitary confinement was admissible under certain circumstances, such as the protection of lesbian, gay or bisexual detainees or people who had fallen foul of prison gangs. But he said there was no justification for using it as a penalty, because that's an inhumane penalty.'

Mendez made reference to the case of accused WikiLeaks founder Bradley Manning, who spent eight months in solitary at a military brig in Virginia before being moved to general population to await court-martial. Mendez said he planned to issue a report on Manning and other cases in the next few weeks.

Mendez also told reporters that he himself had spent three days in solitary in the 1970s in his native Argentina, then under military dictatorship, and they were the three longest days in my life.

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, Blood in the Face. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received

a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

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.

Solitary Watch Arizona Solitary Confinement Suicide investigation showed DOC negligence in this preventable suicide in an Arizona detention cell Was this torture??? you decide

watch video link <http://www.azcentral.com/video/1259212342001>

Re: Tony Lester Story video aired November 5, 2011

I was most fortunate to watch the video your station aired last Friday concerning the Anthony Lester suicide in an Arizona prison. It was most interesting and eye opening but at the same time, horrific in nature and content. I normally don't comment on news articles as they are normally brief and vague in content but found this video compelling in the sense of how the investigator, Wendy H. brought the matter to the level it deserved to be placed.

wait, I am sorry but does this mean that solitary may be banned 100% in the United States soon? I am a 17 year old male serving a 1 year sentence of probation in constant fear and anxiety that if I get suspended from school or slip up once I get sent back to solitary for a weekend, after that it gets longer each slip up I do. I have already been in solitary before. This probation has ruined my life leading to severe depression and suicidal thoughts if I were forced to go back. Reading this article almost brought me to tears seeing that someone else understands this is cruel torture. I live everyday in constant fear, anxiety, panic attacks, and depression all from my experience 3 and half months ago at secure lockup. I didn't understand this fully if this is saying that solitary is now banned? If that is so I will finally feel happy again, an emotion I haven't had since lockup, as well as tears of joy for all the other solitary prisoners in the world. My heart goes out to you and I hope one day this will be banned and marked cruel, unusual, psychologically and physically damaging. Thank you to anyone who responds. God bless you all.

AS OF TODAY< OCTOBER 23rd,

the guys in Pelican Bay are BEING SEVERELY PUNISHED for the 115s they got while on the hunger strike,. losing up to 90 days of yard, canteen TV and anything else they can throw at them.

Pelican Bay staff are playing a hard handed game. They seem to be enjoying the ugliness they are doling out like candy at a kiddie parade.

The prison and all its lovely staff are doing what they can to get these guys to flip in anger so they can take away their chance of going mainline. this shit is FAR from over.

if you want to see some serious changes, then YOU need to continue to make noise and let the public officials ( state assembly members etc) KNOW the guys are being treated even worse than before.

Herein this use of solitary confinement to be used as a penalty comes the variances that are imposed inside such parameters that may or can constitute unusual punishment or cruelty to the persons incarcerated and confined inside such special housing units for reasons deemed to be rational and practical under correctional guidelines. Because of its mere location and isolation from the rest of the world's eyes, solitary confinement is most often misunderstood. It has been described as a place where there are individuals who are labeled worse of the worst creating stereotyping that is both inaccurate and most harmful to their needs of protection and civil rights considerations by the system and the courts. Internal controls established by the units management imposes additional alleged unintentional punitive measures to manage the individuals behaviors creating a conflict in established methods of managing the prisoners needs while housed inside this special unit. This fever to play the role of the punisher creates informal corrective or preventive measures that are not outlined within any written document or policy leaving its interpretation up to the punisher. without going into depth of these draconian methods of punishing a prisoners negative behaviors, it can easily lead to abuse, neglect and eventual torturous conditions. It is these unofficial sanctions imposed by these punishers that escapes the eyes of the top administrators and the attention of our courts. Through tacit approval and the code of silence, these sanctions are imposed and permitted to occur randomly to adjust attitudes or modify behaviors with or without incentives.

Solitary confinement should be a rigid procedure that is constantly maintained under the scrutiny of an independent panel not influenced by the units correctional hierarchy or command systems. It should be composed of five (5) individuals who are skilled and trained with extensive backgrounds in the areas of due process, medical care, mental health standards , operational security and internal affairs

experience. The final review for approval or disapproval would rest with the director of operational concerns in a centralized position. The process this oversight panel would implement would be two-folded. The first purpose is to review the justification for placement process documented of the prisoner to review the case and facts. This should be done no later than 60 days after initial placement to allow a time period of adjustment to consider behavioral adjustment recorded or misconduct reported. The second purpose of this five (5) member panel would be to review those use of force reports identified to be questionable and possible excessive force situations based on the considerations of physical evidence of injuries, hospitalization of prisoner, statements by the participants in the action, a psychological assessment of the prisoner and a review of the disciplinary history to establish patterns of behaviors that need housing adjustments. Even if these independent placement and activity reviews are random and taken at a percentage of events as they occurred, the matter of fact remains that employees and unit management are aware there are formal regulation oversight procedures in place to verify the reasons for placement, the justification for actions taken and the possible repercussions of behaviors contrary to policies and procedures giving the system legitimate tools to provide sound guidance for solitary confinement and its associated problems. It is highly likely that the number of placements inside these special units would be adjusted as more avenues are provided for prisoners to air their concerns creating a more balanced environment within such a restrictive concept.

Source:

[http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/9054407/solitary\\_confinement\\_review\\_panels.html?cat=72](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/9054407/solitary_confinement_review_panels.html?cat=72)

This is an extremely important recognition of the use of long term isolation as a form of torture. To think that we use it for our most seriously mentally ill is almost impossible to fathom. America is better than this.

so glad to hear some one els say it dose not mater what you call it it still all means the same thing solitary i ben saying that forever now so glad to hear the un say that and yes seclueson used in schools is or prisons seclueson is just a nuther word for solitary bout time they see that may thare be light in the darknes of justice

P.O. Box 11374  
Washington, DC 20008

[info@solitarywatch.org](mailto:info@solitarywatch.org)

Solitary Watch

Copyright 2022, Solitary Watch

Read about [rights and permissions](#).



**Solitary Watch News**