

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

<http://www.nrcat.org/about/nrcat-press-releases/1138-126-organizations-call-on-white-house-to-seek-elimination-of-prolonged-solitary-confinement>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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126 Organizations, Including 39 Religious Organizations, Call on White House to Seek Elimination of Prolonged Solitary Confinement in U.S. Prisons

Letter Follows Presidential Announcement of Nationwide Review of Isolation

WASHINGTON Today, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture joined 126 organizations, including 39 religious organizations, in urging the White House to ensure that a national review of solitary confinement leads to concrete recommendations to eliminate long-term isolation in United States prisons and jails. In July, before his historic visit to El Reno federal prison, President Obama made his most critical statements on solitary confinement to date and announced the Department of Justice will conduct a national review of the practice.

[The letter to the President](#) comes on the heels of a study of the federal Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) use of solitary confinement, which detailed widespread abuse, the placement of persons with severe mental illness in solitary, and estimated that more than 10,000 individuals are held in conditions of isolation by BOP on any given day.

Prolonged solitary confinement has been defined as torture by the United Nations and is widely opposed by human rights, criminal justice reform and religious organizations. The National Religious Campaign Against Torture has mobilized people of faith to oppose solitary confinement for many years. With momentum building over the past months, today over twenty national religious organizations including the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), the Union for Reform Judaism, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, and the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church joined this call for the White House to ensure the nationwide review outlines a clear path toward ending long-term solitary confinement.

Rev. Ron Stief, executive director of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture said, "For people of faith, the widespread practice of prolonged solitary confinement in our nation's prisons and jails is a moral outrage. It is unconscionable that, on any given day, more than 80,000 incarcerated people, including adults and youth, are held in conditions of isolation that we know to be torture. People of color, the poor, and individuals with mental illness bear the brunt of this cruelty. To deny people meaningful human interaction, through solitary confinement, is to violate their very humanity, and debase the divine spark in each of us. To release people directly from solitary confinement into our communities is not only a public safety concern, but betrays our moral commitment to justice that is truly restorative and transformative. For people of faith, it is imperative that the Obama Administration ensure that the nationwide review of solitary confinement create a road map for the elimination of this torture."

***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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President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As representatives of civil and human rights organizations, religious organizations, faith-based and community leaders, and mental health professionals, we applaud your recent historic remarks recognizing that solitary confinement does nothing to rehabilitate those who are incarcerated. We also welcome your announcement that the U.S. Attorney General will conduct a national review of the practice in prisons and jails across the United States. We are writing to urge that this review result in recommendations that create a clear pathway toward the elimination of the use of long-term and indefinite isolation in the United States.

Following two Congressional hearings on solitary confinement, a highly critical report on the federal Bureau of Prison's (BOP) use of solitary confinement by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in May 2013; and an independent audit of BOP's use of solitary confinement released in February 2015, it is abundantly clear that solitary confinement is overused and abused across the country. In fact, the audit of BOP's practices found that more than 10,000 people were subject to solitary confinement in federal prisons on any given day in 2013. In some of these units, terms of solitary confinement average nearly four years. In light of these findings, the expert auditors recommended that the agency take immediate steps, including:

Despite the urgency of the audit's findings, to date, BOP has not made public any plans for implementation of its recommendations. It is imperative they do so without delay.

Nationwide, on any given day, more than 80,000 people, including children and persons with mental illness, are held in conditions of solitary confinement in state and federal prisons for month, years, even decades, with many more facing conditions of extreme isolation in jails, detention centers, and juvenile justice facilities throughout the United States. Thousands are released directly from solitary back into our communities profoundly damaged.

Neuroscience, ethics and international human rights law widely consider solitary confinement a form of torture. Indeed decades of research demonstrate the harms of solitary confinement on human beings. Its systematic and widespread use in our criminal justice system compromises our stated commitments to human rights, human dignity, the human potential for redemption, and public safety.

States and jurisdictions across the country are implementing policy changes that focus on alternatives to solitary confinement. Some have abolished the practice for persons under the age of 18, pregnant women, and for persons with mental illness. Several states are also considering legislative proposals that embrace the recommendations of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, which include prohibiting placement in solitary confinement beyond 15 consecutive days. Supporting and incentivizing such reforms across the country and in the BOP should be an explicit goal of the Attorney General's study of solitary confinement.

For the well-being of the men and women incarcerated in federal prisons, the communities to which they will return, and the staff employed by federal facilities, we urge you to ensure the implementation of the BOP auditors' recommendations without delay. We further urge you to ensure a national review that prioritizes humane alternatives to prolonged solitary confinement, including mental health treatment, rehabilitation, and a clear path to the elimination of long-term isolation. Such a review should be completed with enough time for your administration to be able implement its recommendations.

The torture of prolonged solitary confinement compromises public safety, increases recidivism, is immoral and indeed has no place in any civilized society. Now is the time to act to ensure it has no place in our own.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
African American Ministers in Action (AAMIA)
African American Ministers Leadership Council (AAMLC)
African Methodist Episcopal Minister's Coalition for Redemption and Justice
Alaska Innocence Project
American Friends Service Committee
American Humanist Association
Arizona Center for Disability Law
Arizona Innocence Project
Arizona Justice Project
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Brookline PeaceWorks
Brooklyn Defender Services
California Families Against Solitary Confinement
California Innocence Project
California Prison Focus
Campaign for Youth Justice
Center for Public Representation
Center for Race, Religion, and Economic Democracy
Chicago Committee to Defend the Bill of Rights
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Defense Fund - Ohio
Children's Law Center, Inc.
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada
Church of the Brethren, Office of Public Witness
Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) International
Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) Virginia
Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) Nevada
Community Legal Aid Society, Inc
Connecticut Innocence Project
Council of Bishops, United Methodist Church
Criminal Justice Policy Coalition
Deaf Community Action Network (DeafCAN!)
Disability Rights Iowa
Disability Rights Maine
Disability Rights Washington
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

End Mass Incarceration Together (EMIT), a Unitarian Universalist Mass Action working group (Massachusetts)

Family Unity Network of Imprisoned People

Florida Council of Churches

Florida Institutional Legal Services Project

Florida Justice Institute

Fortune Society

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Global Justice Institute

Hip Hop Caucus

Human Rights First

Human Rights Watch

I.S.P. Consulting

Illinois Coalition Against Torture

Illinois Innocence Project

Incarcerated Nation Corp.

Innocence & Justice Clinic, Wake Forest University School of Law

Innocence Project

Interfaith Action for Human Rights

Just Leadership USA

Legal Aid Justice Center, Charlottesville, Virginia

Life After Innocence

Maine Council of Churches

Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition

Maryland Disability Law Center

Mass Incarceration Working Group, First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington (MA)

Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice

Metropolitan Community Churches

Midwest Innocence Project

Montana Innocence Project

Muslim Justice League

NAACP Maine State Prison Branch

NAACP Portland Maine Branch

NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI Huntington

NAMI New York State

National Center for Lesbian Rights

National Council of Churches

National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)

National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT)

North Carolina Center on Actual Innocence

New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement

New York City Jails Action Coalition

New York Law School Innocence Clinic

North Carolina Stop Torture Now

Office of Social Justice of the Christian Reformed Church

Ohio Innocence Project

Pax Christi Massachusetts

Pax Christi USA

Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Pennsylvania Innocence Project

Peoples' Action for Rights and Community (PARC)

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)

Princeton's Students for Prison Education and Reform (SPEAR)

Prison Activist Resource Center (PARC)

Prison Law Office

Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts

Prisoners' Legal Services of New York

Protection & Advocacy Project (Disability Rights North Dakota)

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities, Inc. (SC)

Ramsay Merriam Fund

Resources for Organizing and Social Change (ROSC)

Sisters of St. Joseph Non-Violence Committee

Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood NY

Social Action Linking Together (SALT)

Social Workers Against Prolonged Solitary Confinement

Solitary Confinement. Org

Southern Poverty Law Center

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Manhattanville

St. Susanna Peace and Justice Committee, Dedham MA

Sylvia Rivera Law Project

Tamms Year Ten

The Association of Legal Aid Attorneys, UAW Local 2325

The Correctional Association of New York

The Real Cost of Prisons Project

T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Association

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

University of Miami Innocence Clinic

Uptown People's Law Center

Virginia Council of Churches

Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs

West Virginia Innocence Project

WISDOM of Wisconsin

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Boston Branch

Wrongful Conviction Clinic at IU McKinney

Wrongful Conviction Project, Office of the Ohio Public Defender

cc: U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch

(Note: National religious organizations are **bolded**, local and regional religious organizations are listed in *italics*)

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