

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2013/08/28/un-solitary-confinement-in-the-us-can-be-torture-force-feeding-unacceptable/>

## Policy Issue Resources

close

Search

close

close

by [Lisa Dawson](#) | August 28, 2013



The use of solitary confinement in California prisons can amount to cruel punishment, even torture. This is according to a recent [news release](#) from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in which UN Special Rapporteur on torture Juan Mndez addresses the issue of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons and specifically those in California.

The statement came as nearly 100 people in three California state prisons were engaged in day 47 of a prison [hunger strike](#). The hunger strike began on July 8, with more than 30,000 prisoners in two thirds of California prisons refusing food in protest of long-term segregation and inhumane conditions.

Mndez, who is a former political prisoner, asserts that prolonged solitary is cruel and inhumane, stating that even short periods in isolation often cause mental and physical suffering or humiliation, amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and if the resulting pain or sufferings are severe, solitary confinement even amounts to torture.

The UN rights expert urges the U.S. government to place restrictions on use solitary to ensure that the practice is only imposed, if at all, in very exceptional circumstances, as a last resort, for as short a time as possible and with established safeguards in place.

Mndez further calls for an unconditional ban on solitary confinement of any length on children, people with disabilities, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and those serving life sentences or on death row.

Honing in on California's continuing prison crisis, the UN expert expresses concern about the brutal conditions at Pelican Bay State Prison, where more than 400 prisoners have been held in solitary confinement for over a decade, and the average time a prisoner spends in solitary confinement is 7.5 years.

Of particular concern to Mndez are the approximately 4,000 people who are held in California's Security Housing Units (SHU) on an indefinite or prolonged basis.

Referring to a District Judge's recent approval of California's request to force-feed prisoners, the release quotes Mndez as stating that it is not acceptable to use threats of forced feeding or other types of physical or psychological coercion against individuals who have opted for the extreme recourse of a hunger strike.

Mndez has in the past repeatedly addressed the matter of segregation in U.S. prisons. The release specifically notes his 2011 [report](#) to the UN General Assembly and his numerous communications to the Government in which he calls on authorities to allow for an assessment of the country's use of isolation by a UN expert.

Following up on Mndez efforts, a coalition of civil and human rights groups [called on the U.S. government](#) in June to extend the special rapporteur a formal invitation to assess the country's use of solitary. To date, the U.S. government has said only that it is in the process of considering the request.

Concluding his recent statement, Mndez underscores his message to the U.S.:

It is about time to provide the opportunity for an *in situ* assessment of the conditions in U.S. prisons and detention facilities.

Lisa Dawson served as an assistant editor, social media manager, and contributor at Solitary Watch. She continues to support prisoners and their family members who need help navigating re-entry. She is on Twitter [@endsolitary](#).

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.

Attn: Urgent

Injustice/Corruption

This is a matter of Life and Death.

This flier is being sent to all Washington DC Officials,  
State Legislators and Officials from all 50 States.  
along with News Medias and other Professionals:  
Journalists Lawyers Religions Activists etc.

Please read..

<https://sites.google.com/site/thefactsofthebbostonbombing/tweets-8-18-13/cover-page>

Thank you

It shouldn't matter what you're incarcerated for. The state isn't given the right to dehumanize another human for any reason. To isolate a person for an indeterminate time in the shu only makes one angry and mentally unsound for the rest of their lives.

Those people don't really want to die, but they are risking their lives only to draw attention to those horrible conditions. And the world must not look on and accept this. If actions are taken or even the USA can intervene in political situations in other countries like it is now probably about to happen once more. Then they should also allow others to criticize what they are doing to people in their own country. The death penalty, life without parole, solitary confinement are all attributes out of Middle Ages and should be abolished!

I find it strange how we are so keen on defending people who themselves did not see it normal to respect the rights of others by stealing, raping, robbing, even killing others. Most of these guys confined committed these crimes. Let them serve their sentences and not complain. Treat them like humans but can not give them five star treatment. They are given very basic rights.

Ah in your opinion solitary confinement is a basic right

I agree that these people have done things that brought them in prison, BUT they were sentenced to a prison confinement, not being excluded from the community they live, and especially and specifically not sentenced to be arbitrarily be confined to a de-humanizing treatment!

Being put in solitary confinement for 1 year because you wrote a letter to your lawyer complaining/informing about the treatment by a guard who raped you is, in my opinion at least, not a matter of serving a sentence.. do you?

And as to defending people who are incarcerated and have no means and or ways to safely defend themselves against brutality, arbitrarily treatment, and more worse things, I think that we, as the People are responsible for those people, and their welfare, as justice to them is done in our name, by the judges and the juries, we are the ones who are in fact making the law, by giving that power to our representatives, but giving something in someones else's hand doesn't mean having no responsibility for the outcome!

My opinion!

Torture is not a part of the sentence. No judge ordered torture with the original sentencing. There is nothing they can do to escape this torture except for CDCR's option for them to snitch on others. They do not simply [sic] choose to die, this is their only honorable and peaceful way to protest being tortured for years with no end (unless they snitch, become an informant).

Referring to a District Judge's recent approval of California's request to force-feed prisoners, the torture expert states that it is not acceptable to use threats of forced feeding or other types of physical or psychological coercion against individuals who have opted for the extreme recourse of a hunger strike.

Forced feeding is not a threat. The state has a responsibility to ensure the prisoners don't die from their hunger strike. Why? Because the

prisoners have a responsibility to serve their sentence, they can not just simple choose to die because they dont like the conditions. Its the same reason someone with an impending execution is put on suicide watch.

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**