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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/08/06/one-year-after-historic-hunger-strike-isolated-ca-inmates-report-little-change/>

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by [Sal Rodriguez](#) | August 6, 2012

At this time one year ago, a three week hunger [strike](#) across California prisons had been concluded, and the California Assembly had begun planning a [hearing](#) on the use of solitary confinement in Californias prisons. The conditions of the California Security Housing Units, where over 3,000 inmates are held in isolation, many for decades, had come to the publics attention. In the time since August 2011, there would be another round of three week hunger strikes, a smaller series of hunger [strikes](#) at the Corcoran Administrative Segregation Unit, a new Step Down Program announced in California, a federal [lawsuit](#) filed by Pelican Bay SHU inmates, and a US Senate [hearing](#) on solitary confinement.

Even so, the situation in the SHUs and ASUs remains much as it did one year ago. A few concessions by prison officials, such as issuing sweatpants and allowing family photos, did nothing to change the problem of long-term isolation and non-existent due process.

It should be reiterated that in California, the majority of SHU inmates are not necessarily there for conduct, but for gang membership.

In a letter to California activists, Pelican Bay hunger strike leader Alfred Sandoval reports feeling like just banging my head against the wall because nothing ever changes around here. Right now the Department of Correction and the current administration have been attempting to pacify prisoners with items like: sweatbands, watch caps, and various food items from the canteen in hopes of distracting us

He continues, the sad fact is that some have been complacent and accepted the physical and psychological abuses as normal because it has been implemented in small increments over decades, year after year so it has become the norm.

Isolated inmates throughout California continue to report desolate conditions and more-of-the-same.

According to J. Heshima Denham in the Corcoran State Prison SHU, The reality is there is a significant number of us for whom death holds no real fear, in fact, in some ways as an alternative to another few decades of this it holds some appeal. If it becomes necessary to take up peaceful protest again and its unfortunately looking that way you may be writing a lot more Christian Gomez articles. Most here only want to, after so very long, hold their children, kiss their wives, speak to their families, and have access to some meaningful program that will give them some hope of parole, higher education, and marketable job skills. But all of this is indicative of a sick society, of values and mores that have never been seriously and confronted and corrected in the history of U.S. social, political, and economic development.

[Christian Gomez](#) was an inmate in Corcoran State Prisons ASU who died while participating in a January-February hunger strike protesting the conditions of the ASU.

One of the leaders of the Corcoran ASU strike, Juan Jaimes, was transferred during the strike to Kern Valley State Prisons ASU unit as a means of limiting the strike. Jaimes recently [reported](#) to the San Francisco Bay View that he has received poor medical care for a broken back.

Another Corcoran inmate who has been in the SHU for over 20 years also reports doubts about the Step Down Program, and thinks that there will be no changes. He also offers his opinion on the validity of the SHU in the first place, echoing the sentiments of many SHU inmates that any use of isolation should be based on conduct rather than gang affiliation.

I don't think anyone should be housed in isolation for more than a few weeks, if at all, and without meaningful program. SHU should consist of a system that includes earning meaningful privileges, and a dignified manner in being released. The SHU should be used for exactly the purpose that it is supposed to be used for: to house those prisoners who conduct threatens the safety and security of the prison, he writes.

An inmate at North Kern State Prisons Administrative Segregation Unit reports that himself and several inmates have waited over a year to be transferred to one of the SHUs. The waiting list can take up to three years, I've been here 15 months due to the overcrowding by the I.G.I. (Institutional Gang Investigators) validating everybody as prison gang members, he writes, a lot of us New Afrikans, Latin Americans, poor whites and indigenous people have been labeled for reading our culture and history. I've witnessed men lose their minds

behind these walls, cut their wrists to kill themselves in order to escape this mental torture, spread feces on themselves and the walls, yell out and scream, some are on psychotropic medication that causes them to turn into human zombies where they dont even know who they are anymore.

Solitary Watch will continue to report on the situation in California as information becomes available.

Sal Rodriguez was Solitary Watchs 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.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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