

# Solitary Watch

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/11/15/new-video-un-torture-expert-juan-mendez-on-solitary-confinement/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | November 15, 2011

Juan E. Mendez is the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Under a mandate from the General Assembly's Human Rights Council, Mendez is charged with investigating and reporting on the use of torture throughout the 193 UN member states, as well as issuing recommendations and urgent appeals. In his first annual report, Mendez [made headlines among solitary watchers](#) by calling 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 was himself a political prisoner and endured torture in his native Argentina in the 1970s. He described his brief stay in solitary confinement as the three longest days of his life. During his [lifelong career as a lawyer and human rights activist](#), Mendez worked with Human Rights Watch, the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, and the International Center for Transitional Justice, among other organizations. In an interview with Solitary Watch in early November at his office at American University's Washington College of Law, where he is currently a visiting professor, Mendez discussed his views and his work on solitary confinement.

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HejkQtIGzIQ]

For more original videos on solitary confinement from experts, activists, and survivors, see (and subscribe to) Solitary Watch's YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/SolitaryWatch>.

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.

November 17, 2011

To whom it may concern:

My reason for writing this letter is because I have a son who is currently incarcerated at Corcoran state prison. Let me begin by saying that my son was a part of the hunger strike at Corcoran state prison and just last week I received a letter from my son telling me that this hunger strike was even harder than the one in September. Furthermore, my son was also gang validated for a wrong reason and he like the other prisoners are struggling to change the validation policy that the CDC has in place, because he believes and I also believe that placing prisoners in the SHU for indeterminate time is very cruel and unusual punishment especially when the CDC has had these prisoners in the SHU for many years and even decades. The interesting part about this whole ordeal is that these prisoners have not been involved in any serious crimes since they were placed in the SHU, I personally think that many of the prisoners who are currently in the SHU deserve a second chance just like any other person especially if he or she has not had any serious 115s or write-ups. In my sons case he was placed in the SHU because he had a telephone book with a name of a person, by the name of Mario Hernandez and that was it for the person or officer who conducted the investigation to determine that this Mario Hernandez whose name appears on my sons telephone book was the one they had in their database to come to a conclusion that indeed this is the same person. Excuse my ignorance but how in the world can someone make the assumption based on a name that is very common in the Latino and or in the Mexican community to find someone guilty of association of being involved with the hard core gang members and to send the accuser to the SHU for an indeterminate time based on a first name and last name with no other information on the phone book. Now if I had a telephone book with the first name, last name, social security number, date of birth and a prison number I would have said bingo the name matches with the database but in my sons case it was not like that, the officer who found the telephone book with Marios Hernandez name in it, no other piece of evidence, made the assumption that the above name was the same person that matched their database and whoever signed the officers declaration was at fault for fabricating false information or for going along with the officers declaration without having to do some type of research to confirm the name in question. One thing I want you to know about me and that is, I am not a criminologist but if I was one I would probably be one of the best criminologists in the United States because I can put one and two together without using any common sense but in my sons validation for association there is something very, very wrong not with how the investigation took place but rather with the use of power of authority for I truly believe that is where the problem is, you be the judge. Also, my son tells me that the CDC or the guards are in a retaliation mode because the prisoners who are waiting to be transferred to the SHU or I might add the prisoners who are currently in the SHU are also speaking out about the validation process and or the policies that are in place by the CDC, with that in mind the CDC doesn't like that! Therefore, the CDC is retaliating against those who were a part of the hunger strike by writing each prisoner who participated in the hunger strike a 115 or in other words a write up, the thing about this particular write up is that the privileges that were given to the hunger strikers back in September will no longer be in effect because the CDC will take back their privileges for a whole year. As a result of this second hunger strike the CDC will place the write ups in the prisoners file to make the prisoners look awful. Therefore, when the prisoner goes to his or her board hearing it will have a huge impact on whatever decision the board makes as it relates to his or her release date because of the write ups. According to the CDC directors the state wide hunger strike was organized by gang members and associates. I truly believe that the CDC director is full of caca or I might add the English version (shit). If a person who is willing to die or starve himself or herself to death, I truly believe that there is definitely something very wrong with that person or else why would 6000 prisoners want to die, again you be the judge. I am inclosing a copy of the write up my son sent to me, please go ahead and publish the 115 and of course I block his name to keep the CDC from retaliating against my son, I hope you understand my reason for blocking my sons name.

Sincerely,

A concerned parent.

P.S. Note my son asked me to block his name from the CDC 115 because he feels that the CDC is going to retaliate against him and please block my name as well because my sons name is the same as mine. Thanks for all the great work you guys do.

Thank you Carl for your endless support of the incarcerated mentally ill. For more info please see [davidshopeaz.org](http://davidshopeaz.org) Davids Hope is dedicated to securing mental health care rather than incarceration for all those living with a serious mental illness.

Please view the Anthony Lester story in link below on MSNBC and then share your comments in the post a comment section following the story. Channel 12 in Phoenix worked diligently to get Tonys story delivered in a truthful unveiling of what life behind bars often means for those with mental illness. Now the rest is up to us. This investigative report on Anthonys death inside the AZ Department of Corrections solitary confinement detention unit has given us the opportunity to draw attention to our incarcerated mentally ill as never before. Please show your support by posting your appreciation and concern in the comment section of the link below.

[http://openchannel.msnbc.msn.com/\\_news/2011/11/15/8818736-did-officers-inaction-lack-of-training-contribute-to-inmates-death](http://openchannel.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2011/11/15/8818736-did-officers-inaction-lack-of-training-contribute-to-inmates-death)

supporting human dignity and respectful treatment of our prisoners and not torture

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