

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/12/28/new-video-national-religious-campaign-against-torture-takes-a-stand-on-solitary-confinement/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | December 28, 2011

Originally formed, in the wake of the Abu Ghraib scandal, to address U.S. torture abroad, the [National Religious Campaign Against Torture](#) is now one of the leading groups dedicated to [ending torture in U.S. prisons](#), with a specific focus on the widespread use and abuse of solitary confinement.

Since its founding in 2006, according to the group, more than 300 religious organizations have joined and over 57,000 individual people of faith have participated in our activities. Members include representatives from the Bahai, Buddhist, Catholic, evangelical Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Orthodox Christian, mainline Protestant, Quaker, Sikh and Unitarian Universalist communities. Members include national denominations and faith groups, regional organizations and congregations. At the core of NRCAT's work is its Statement of Conscience, titled Torture is a Moral Issue:

Torture violates the basic dignity of the human person that all religions, in their highest ideals, hold dear. It degrades everyone involved policy-makers, perpetrators and victims. It contradicts our nations most cherished ideals. Any policies that permit torture and inhumane treatment are shocking and morally intolerable.

Nothing less is at stake in the torture abuse crisis than the soul of our nation. What does it signify if torture is condemned in word but allowed in deed? Let America abolish torture now without exceptions.

In 2009, NRCAT voted to expand its mission to include U.S. prisons, and [produced a report](#) explaining how certain domestic prison practices especially prolonged isolation constitute torture.

In a recent interview in his Washington office, Rev. Richard Killmer, NRCAT's executive director, explained to Solitary Watch that the group's goal is to pass state legislation that in fact prohibits holding someone in solitary confinement beyond a designated period, and also prohibits people with mental illness from being placed in solitary confinement. As for the time limit on solitary, Killmer says, I think 30 days feels like the right figure and that's a long time. I would hope that solitary confinement would be less. Whenever it is used it will only be for a few days at the most, and the reason for that is that it's really clear that solitary confinement harms people, and we've known that for a long time. We've known that since the early 1820s. Charles Dickens in 1841 called solitary confinement torture. So we've known that it does cause harm and all people who run prisons should know solitary confinement causes harm. Currently the Campaign is working on legislation in six states: California, Pennsylvania, Oregon, Texas, Colorado, and Maine. It is also making a film on solitary aimed at people of faith, and it is linked to the ACLU's [Stop Solitary](#) campaign.

Killmer believes that a huge education task that needs to be done with the religious community and American public as a whole. This issue is not on anybody's priority list. To advance this goal, NRCAT has prepared a [statement on solitary confinement](#) that it is asking people of faith around the country to sign. When the group obtains 500 or more signatories in a particular state, it mails them to the governor, legislators, and top corrections officials in that state. The aim, Killmer says, is to create a large constituency of people of faith to challenge the use of prolonged solitary confinement in U.S. prisons and jails.

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_7n7UNIDTg]

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

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On principle, I agree w/the contention about long-term solitary confinement being tantamount to torture, & I have 0 problem believing it is abused by the state, meaning less than rational reasons for its use.

What does bother me is that there seems to be no acknowledgment on the part of bloggers, non-profits, etc., that there are some examples of where it is about the only answer to a problem an inmate presents. Like, when an inmate commits murder in prison. What DO you do with such a person, other than segregate him for good? How can the state ever get to trusting this person AGAIN such that he could be returned to population in the same prison or a different one? If the state should reintegrate the inmate, what would happen if he kills again? The state is responsible for every life it has under its control how would the state ever explain to anyone how it came to be that the murderer earned his way out of solitary, & then sometime afterward, committed another murder? Thomas Silverstein is who I have in mind here, having served >10,000 days in solitary after having killed 2 or 3 people in prison a guard & 1 or 2 inmates. How could this man ever be released back into population, EVER?

I don't see how he ever could.

Nor, the inmate who has been such a disciplinary problem over a period of years how long in solitary til he learns his lesson? How long, til he's rehabbed or is ready to go back to population? How can anyone determine that?

You hit the nail on the head don't look at policies look at the practice, tacit approval. resulting in deviation of written policies that are presented in an audit but don't reveal the real practice. Stay on this and focus on real audits and not in-house audits that don't reveal the real practice of admin segregation and how the rules are followed as well as the treatment of the mentally ill placed inside of there.. focus on the practice and you will find the answer to the abuse and neglect that do at times constitute torture in many ways.. You will find Abu Ghraib DNA in many state systems..

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