

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/10/28/fahad-hashmi-joins-1400-others-in-the-solitary-confinement-capital-of-the-world/>

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by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | October 28, 2010

A [letter](#) sent to Attorney General Eric Holder today by several civil rights groups expresses urgent concern about Syed Fahad Hashmi's conditions of confinement. The letter, from the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), the Council on American-Islamic Relations of New York (CAIR-NY), Educators for Civil Liberties, and the Muslim Justice Initiative, reads in part:

For nearly three years before his case was scheduled to go to trial in April 2010, Syed Fahad Hashmi was held in solitary confinement under Special Administrative Measures (SAMs), which added a severe additional layer of isolation to his confinement. Numerous civil liberties organizations, human rights groups and concerned citizens called attention to the severity and inhumanity of these pretrial conditions of confinement. These included a Statement of Concern signed by 550 academics and writers and weekly vigils outside the prison in lower Manhattan where Syed Hashmi was held.

Facing four counts and a possible 70-year sentence, Syed Hashmi accepted a plea bargain on the eve of trial and pleaded guilty to a single terrorism charge of conspiracy to provide material support for allowing an acquaintance to stay in his apartment with a suitcase of waterproof socks and rain ponchos which the acquaintance then took to Al Qaeda in Pakistan. For this, he was sentenced to 15 years. Over the summer he was moved to the high-security prison at the Florence Correctional Center in Florence, Colorado. He remains in solitary confinement and under SAMs.

Scholarly and medical research has overwhelmingly demonstrated the severe health effects of prolonged solitary confinement; military officials and Vietnam veterans including Senator John McCain have testified to its damaging results. The use of prolonged solitary confinement puts the United States increasingly out of step with world opinion and is an affront to American values of civil rights and humane treatment. Other people convicted of terrorism-related charges, including John Walker Lindh, Richard Reid, and Matt Hale have seen their SAMs not renewed. We ask the U.S. Department of Justice to not renew Syed Hashmi's SAMs and to end his solitary confinement.

As the letter describes, Hashmi's conditions of confinement were at one time the focus of high-profile protests in part because he had not yet been convicted of any crime, but perhaps also because he was being [held in these torturous conditions](#) right in the middle of downtown Manhattan. Now Hashmi has been placed in the solitary confinement capital of the world, where there will be no candlelight vigils for him or for any of the hundreds of other human beings living in similar conditions.

As we noted in an [earlier post](#), the complex of federal and state prisons in and around Caon City, Colorado, contains some 1,400 solitary confinement cells. Hashmi shares ADX Florence, the most secure prison in the federal system, with about 400 others. Even if the Justice Department lifts his Special Administrative Measures which impose additional restrictions on communications and visitation he will be held in extreme isolation in a prison described by one former warden as a clean version of hell.

Hashmi, as the letter states, is subject to this punishment because he consorted with someone who sent socks to Al Qaeda. This may seem like an extreme case, but it is not an isolated one. Among the 1,400 other men in solitary confinement in Caon City, many are there for such offenses as fighting with other inmates or guards, being identified as gang members, trying to escape, having contraband, or failing to follow orders. Still others are there, effectively, because they are Muslims, because they suffer from mental illness, or because they are children. *Any of these things can condemn a prisoner to spending months or years living in conditions that much of the world considers torture.

* See the most recent additions to our [new video collection](#) for examples from the supermax Colorado State Penitentiary.

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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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A sincere and heartfelt thanks to you, Solitary Watch, for posting this and for your relentless work on the inhumane conditions of detention in this country. As you note above, concerns about Fahad's well-being are at a crisis point now that he is no longer in Manhattan but instead thousands of miles away in Florence Supermax and given that there has been NO COMMUNICATION allowed between him and his family and lawyers. Effectively, he has been disappeared right here in 2010 USA. As an organizer who has worked on this case for the past year and half, this new stage of events is hard to take in.

Given the situation of the US use of prolonged and indefinite solitary confinement RIGHT HERE ON US SOIL and given Americans' heightened sensitivity to our use of torture in places like Abu Ghraib and Bagram, it seems we are at a point in time when there could be effective organizing of vigils and protests outside of domestic torture sites across the US where human beings are being held under Special Administrative Measures and in solitary confinement. Torture isn't acceptable in Abu Ghraib and it's not acceptable here on US soil either. No Guantánamos at Home or Abroad was what our banner said here in NYC during vigils for Fahad. Perhaps we could expand these vigils to domestic torture sites across the country.

Hopefully the plight of foreigners will bring to light all that Americans suffer at the hands of our prison system. Solitary and isolation are happening all over the country, not just Fremont county. And it is for many of the petty reasons stated in your article. And in my opinion, it is really just to squeeze more money from the people of this country as this is the new slavery: keeping people in chains is big money, big business. Bigger than GM/Wal-mart/Ford put together.

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