

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/10/17/tonight-in-nyc-forum-on-solitary-confinement-features-un-special-rapporteur-on-torture/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | October 17, 2011

Tonight, a coalition of human rights and civil rights groups and faith communities will host a briefing and panel discussion on solitary confinement in U.S. prisons and jails, featuring some of the leading experts and advocates on this issue as well as the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, who tracks torture worldwide. The following material comes from the [flyer about the forum](#).

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), The General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Human Rights Watch, Rabbis for Human Rights- North America, Physicians for Human Rights, Metro New York Religious Campaign Against Torture, The Mennonite Central Committee UN Office, Unitarian Universalist Association United Nations Office, Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations, Amnesty International USA

Invite you to attend a briefing and panel discussion on

Tuesday, October 18, 2011, 6:00 PM- 7:30 PM

Church Center for the United Nations, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, New York

44th Street Entrance Second Floor Conference Room

Each day tens of thousands of prisoners and detainees in the U.S. and abroad are held in solitary confinement. Usually in isolation for at least 23 hours a day and denied all meaningful human contact, these prisoners and detainees are frequently held for months, years, and sometimes decades in conditions that the Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council has found can amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and even torture. This briefing will examine the detrimental impacts of solitary confinement, the science that supports its finding as a human rights violation, and the disproportionate impact of its use on mentally ill persons and youth. Panelists will also explore the legal framework for protecting prisoners and detainees from solitary confinement and strategies advocates and others are currently using to end its abusive use.

Keynote by

Juan E. Mendez, Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment

Panel discussion by

*** Rev. Richard Killmer, Executive Director, National Religious Campaign Against Torture**

*** David Fathi, Director, National Prison Project, American Civil Liberties Union**

*** Jamie Fellner, Senior Advisor, U.S. Program, Human Rights Watch**

*** Dr. Homer Venters, MD MS, Center for Health and Human Rights, NYU Medical School**

*** Prof. Craig Haney, Department of Psychology, University of California, Santa Cruz**

In August, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Mendez, issued an interim report on the use of solitary confinement internationally. The report summary follows, but the [full report](#) is well worth reading.

Interim report of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Summary

In the present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 65/205, the Special Rapporteur addresses issues of special concern and recent developments in the context of his mandate. The Special Rapporteur draws the attention of the General Assembly to his assessment that solitary confinement is practised in a majority of States. He finds that where the physical conditions and the prison regime of solitary confinement cause severe mental and physical pain or suffering, when used as a punishment, during pre-trial detention, indefinitely, prolonged, on juveniles or persons with mental disabilities, it can amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and even torture. In addition, the use of solitary confinement increases the risk that acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment will go undetected and unchallenged.

The report highlights a number of general principles to help to guide States to re-evaluate and minimize its use and, in certain cases, abolish the practice of solitary confinement. The practice should be used only in very exceptional circumstances, as a last resort, for as short a time as possible. He further emphasizes the need for minimum procedural safeguards, internal and external, to ensure that all persons deprived of their liberty are treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.

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.

Great day for America and human rights. Let this discussion and unveiling of the truth hidden behind our prison gates ring loud and long. We must bring to light how America has abandoned true rehabilitation of our inmates. Why do we hold our most seriously mentally ill in conditions which truly meet the definition of torture. Thank God almighty for all who are involved in this effort.

glad to see this is happening it is time we see this sick use of solitary as it is being used stoped may there be light in the darknes of justice

I am so grateful to God that awareness into this explosion of prisoner confinement in solitary SHU supermax is torture and missing compassion and redemption. I write the hunger strikers at Pelican Bay to warm their hearts that their message is Heard! I spent 10 years in prison on drug charges where I turned my life around writing novels, now published, using prisoners art for book covers!

Looking forward to the reading the minutes of this discussion and learn how thorough this forum has looked into the negative effects of solitary confinement in all prison and jail systems nationwide and not just California.. patiently waiting to grasp the problems depth and range of misdeeds identified.

Hello from Denver. Needing video of the panel discussion for a video Im producing on ad-seg. Any chance someone whos planning on attending could contact me about videotaping, please? Im at greenindenver@gmail.com. Thanks. Susan Greene

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