



National Religious Campaign
Against Torture

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The American Institute of Architects
1735 New York Ave., NW
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Dear AIA Board Members,

We are writing in support of the proposed amendment to the AIA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct circulated by Architects / Designers / Planners for Social Responsibility. ADPSR's petition asks AIA to recognize solitary confinement as a form of torture or other prohibited cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment and to end the human rights abuses that arise in prisons designed specifically for solitary confinement as well as for executions. Recognizing that prolonged solitary confinement can cause serious harm to prisoners, it has long been considered a form of torture. As a coalition of religious communities, NRCAT agrees strongly with ADPSR's position, and has helped to give voice to thousands of members of religious communities to speak out to end the use of prolonged solitary confinement in U.S. prisons.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) is a national membership organization committed to ending U.S.-sponsored torture, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Since its formation in January 2006, more than 320 religious organizations have joined NRCAT, including representatives from the Catholic, evangelical Christian, mainline Protestant, Unitarian Universalist, Quaker, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i, Buddhist, and Sikh communities. Members include national denominations and faith groups, regional organizations and local congregations. Additionally, more than 69,000 individuals of all major faiths have participated in its work through telephone and e-mail campaigns, public events, and other outreach and advocacy efforts.

We respect and admire the dedication, skill, and love that architects have brought to shaping our houses of worship. We are reaching out to you, AIA, as the collective representative of those architects, to let you know that just as much as we value your contributions to our religious life, we want you to join us in addressing the small group of buildings that are an affront to our religious commitments and to universal human rights. In order to end the suffering caused by prolonged solitary confinement, many of us must speak out from our positions in civil society. We speak out as religious communities, and we urge you to speak out as a professional community to end the design of spaces for prolonged solitary confinement.

Experts estimate that tens of thousands of prisoners in the U.S. criminal justice system are currently being held in solitary confinement. The vast majority of these inmates are detained in state prison facilities. Prisoners held in solitary confinement are often detained in a cell by themselves for 23 hours a day. Some prisoners are kept in these conditions for months, years, or even decades. Medical experts have stated that prisoners held in isolation for extended periods

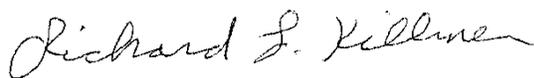
experience symptoms akin to delirium, and the impact on mentally ill prisoners is especially damaging. Alarming, these prisoners are sometimes released from solitary confinement units directly to their communities when they complete their prison sentence.

We need to invest in humane alternatives that address the mental health needs of prisoners in a way that effectively contributes both to their rehabilitation and to their successful transition back into society. Because holding prisoners in solitary confinement units is significantly more expensive than keeping them in the general prison population, instituting humane alternatives makes sense, both financially and morally.

As people of faith, we believe that we must end the use of prolonged solitary confinement in all 50 states and the federal prison system. It is costly, inhumane and ineffective; it harms prisoners and our communities. Accordingly, we also believe that we should cease the construction of buildings specifically devoted to this inhumane practice. We urge you to amend your Code of Ethics to make it clear that such buildings are beyond the pale of acceptable architectural work.

We would be glad to discuss this with you further and can be reached at our offices by dialing (202) 547-1920.

Sincerely,



Rev. Richard L. Killmer
Executive Director
National Religious Campaign Against Torture



Laura Markle Downton, M.Div.
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National Religious Campaign Against Torture