



**American Friends
Service Committee**



**National Religious Campaign
Against Torture**

July 17, 2013

Hon. Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor of California
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

cc: Dr. Jeffrey A. Beard
Secretary, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

A Religious Call for a Just and Humane End to the Hunger Strike in California Prisons

Dear Governor Brown:

We write as clergy and religious leaders in California and throughout the United States who stand in support of the five demands of the California state prison inmates who have now resumed their peaceful hunger strike. These core demands for reform are related to solitary confinement – a practice where prisoners are confined to a small, windowless cell, without sunlight, fresh air, meaningful human contact or constructive activity for many years, even decades.

Our various faith traditions hold in common a belief in the dignity and worth of each human person. Prolonged and indefinite solitary confinement violates basic religious values of justice, compassion, and healing.

The scale of prolonged solitary confinement in California is staggering, with well over ten thousand adult prisoners currently held in some form of solitary confinement in California prisons. California leads the nation in the percentage of its state prison inmates who are subjected to this abusive treatment at any given time. Another very disturbing feature of solitary confinement in California is the high percentage of people of color subjected to it. Actual numbers are not kept, but estimates suggest that 90% of inmates in Security Housing Units are people of color.

We realize that a number of changes have been made in policies related to solitary confinement since the last hunger strikes. However, these changes do not place any limits on the length of time a person can be held in these conditions.

Extended solitary confinement is globally recognized as torture. Cut off from any normal human interaction, enduring sensory and physical deprivation, many prisoners describe their experience in the SHU as the experience of being “buried alive.” Juan Mendez, Special Rapporteur for Torture for the United Nations, has testified that indefinite and prolonged solitary confinement in excess of 15 days should be subject to an absolute prohibition. Article I of the UN Convention

Against Torture prohibits policies and practices that “constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.”

While prison and public safety are cited as reasons for prolonged solitary confinement, we believe that prison safety, and public safety, can be maintained consistent with principles of humanity and human rights. Religious leaders throughout the United States have advocated for an end to the use of prolonged solitary confinement because it is a destructive practice. In states, including Mississippi and Maine, where significant reductions have been made in the use of solitary confinement, there has been an increase in institutional safety.

We support the five core demands which include: (1) eliminate group punishments for individual rules violations, (2) comply with the recommendations of the US Commission on Safety and Abuse in Prisons (2006) regarding an end to long-term solitary confinement, (3) expand and provide constructive programs and privileges for indefinite SHU inmates, (4) abolish the debriefing policy and modify active/inactive gang status criteria, and (5) provide adequate food.

Those most directly impacted are the thousands of human beings in solitary confinement. The circumstances of their detention causes anguish for their families and loved ones. Yet, all of us are impacted, because the way in which we as a society treat those in prison pervades our culture and diminishes us all.

We are calling on you to honor the reasonable core demands of prisoners in SHU (Security Housing Units) in order to bring this hunger strike to a swift and humane end.

Sincerely,

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 Juanita Peters, Colorado Springs, CO
 Joy Peterson, Dubuque, IA
 Susan Peterson, San Diego, CA
 William Phelan, Tallahassee, FL
 Vargus Pike, Portland, OR
 Dr. Dwight Platt, Newton, KS
 Alan Podber, Brattleboro, VT
 Robert Poignant, Lynchburg, VA
 Deborah Potter, Dunn Loring, VA
 Margaret Power, Chicago, IL
 Russell Preister, Alamosa, CO
 Dr. Gail Presbey, Detroit, MI
 John Pulvino, Lakewood, CA
 James Pustorino, Bayonne, NJ
 Maurine Pyle, Carbondale, IL
 Joyce Raby, Sarasota, FL
 Lailaa Ragins, Chattanooga, TN
 Ruth Ramsey, Skillman, NJ
 Walter Ramsey, Oakley, CA
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 Patricia Raymond, Island Lake, IL
 Trudi Reinhardt, Palo Alto, CA
 James Reinke, Duluth, MN
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 Yolanda Reynolds, San Jose, CA
 Mike Richards, London, England
 Carol Rienstra, Grand Rapids, MI
 Geraldine Ring, Cork, ot
 Judith Lynn Rissenberg, Brattleboro, VT
 Eleanor Robins, Arlington, VA
 Dr. Killian Robinson, Winston-Salem, NC
 Susan Robinson, Columbia, SC
 Josephine Roche, Chicago, IL
 Marcia Rock, R.N., Englewood, OH
 Karl Rodenberg, Bueckeburg, Germany
 Paula Roderick, Chicago, IL
 Delia Rodriguez, Los Angeles, CA
 Richard Rogers, Philadelphia, PA
 Thomas Rogers, Eagle, ID
 Timothy Root, Claremont, CA
 Wilson Ross, San Francisco, CA

Ford Rowan, Annapolis, MD
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Dawn Rubbert, St. Louis, MO
Dahlia Rudavsky, Waban, MA
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Katharine Ruthroff, Eldridge, CA
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Wright Salisbury, Lexington, MA
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James Santos, Stowe, VT
Karen Saum, Belfast, ME
Antonia Saxon, Trumansburg, NY
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Vivian Schatz, Philadelphia, PA
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Henry Schlenker, Tacoma, WA
Penny Schoner, San Francisco, CA
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John Stoltenberg, Elkhart Lake, WI
Martha Stoltenberg
Gordon Strother, Bethel, CT
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Shelley Teepe, St. Louis, MO
Richard Tholin, Evanston, IL
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Jana Tift, Boca Raton, FL
Nancy Traer, Claremont, CA
Dr. Robert Traer, Albany, CA
Dr. Royce Truex, Kentfield, CA
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Natalie Van Leekwijck, Beaverton, OR
Barbara Van Noord, Amherst, MA
Karen Vander Molen, Franklin, TN
Susan Vanderburgh, Oakland, CA
Michael Vaughan, Atlanta, GA
Elsie Vega, Iowa City, IA
Dr. Mario F. Venegas, Chicago, IL
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Tara Verbridge, Windsor, MI
Rachel Villareal, Baldwin Park, CA
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Marilyn Vogt-Downey, Brooklyn, NY
Jerry Vorbach, Montclair, NJ
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Art Wagner, Pasadena, MD
Carla Wallace, Louisville, KY
Kathleen Wang, Diamond Bar, CA
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Beverly Weatherill, Orange, CA
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Anne G. Woodhead, Frankfort, KY
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Tom Yamaguchi, Berkeley, CA
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Dr. Kenneth Ziebell, Woburn, MA