



National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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President Barack H. Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20050

Dear Mr. President,

You will make history this week when you become the first U.S. president to visit a federal prison. As people of faith, we affirm the significance of your visit as it underscores that inherent human dignity does not end at the prison gates. Together with your impending executive actions on sentencing reform, you have an opportunity to build a legacy as a champion of criminal justice reform. However, every bit as important as reforming the harsh sentences that send far too many, disproportionately people of color, to prison, is addressing the conditions that those who are incarcerated endure. On behalf of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, I urge you to visit a solitary confinement unit when you travel to El Reno Federal Prison on Thursday.

Following two Congressional hearings on solitary confinement, a recent federal Bureau of Prisons' internal audit found that 10,000 people were subject to solitary confinement in federal prisons in 2013. While solitary confinement is supposedly designed to temporarily separate incarcerated people for their own safety or the safety of others, far too many people spend months, years and even decades in this abject condition. The United Nations declares solitary confinement lasting longer than fifteen days to be torture, and studies show that incarcerated victims of solitary suffer long lasting and debilitating psychological consequences. You cannot get an accurate picture of our prison system without witnessing the pain and suffering of those in solitary.

You have been an outspoken critic of torture throughout your presidency - you should not remain silent when it comes to solitary confinement. This is an issue that unites people across the religious spectrum, from Evangelical Christians to Catholics, Muslims to Buddhists to Jews. People of all faiths understand that solitary confinement violates a fundamental tenet our religious traditions hold in common: that every child of God is entitled to be treated with dignity and humanity.

As people of faith, we prioritize justice that is restorative. Yet thousands endure the torture of solitary in federal prisons under your watch and thousands more suffer in state penitentiaries across the country, many of whom are released directly from solitary back into our communities profoundly damaged. To enter our prisons is to encounter the reality of who we are as a nation. This week you have a rare opportunity to bear witness to that suffering, and as President you

have an unparalleled platform to address it. You should not leave El Reno Federal Prison this Thursday without seeing a solitary confinement unit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Stief", is centered below the word "Sincerely,".

Rev. Ron Stief
Executive Director