



INTERFAITH ACTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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Tuesday 2/25/2014	Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights	<b><u>"Reassessing Solitary Confinement II: The Human Rights, Fiscal, and Public Safety Consequences"</u></b>
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Interfaith Action for Human Rights is a mid-Atlantic partner with the the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), serving Northern Virginia, Washington, DC, and Maryland. Working in concert with NRCAT, IAHR focuses on human rights abuses that are perpetrated by the United States government or by local or state government in the United States.

Prolonged solitary confinement - isolation beyond 15 days - has been declared torture by the UN Rapporteur on Torture, Dr. Juan Mendez. IAHR calls for an end to prolonged solitary confinement - by whatever name it may be called - segregation, secure housing, whether it be one prisoner or two to a cell.

Solitary confinement is the deliberate isolation of prisoners who are kept 22 - 23 hours per day in a cell the size of a small bathroom, sometimes with another prisoner, but severely - sometimes entirely - restricted from any program activity, reading material, exercise or fresh air. Severe isolation coupled with enforced inactivity for long periods of time has been shown to increase the incidents of attempted suicide and self mutilation, to cause hallucinations, ungovernable rage, clinical depression and to negatively affect the ability of the prisoner to adapt to society, either in the general prison population or to reintegrate into society at large. In a word, it is torture. It must stop.

While the federal government has been slow to act on this issue, several states have begun to take action. Just this past week New York state reported an end to solitary confinement for minors and pregnant women - not enough, but a start. Washington State, New Mexico, Maine, Mississippi and Colorado are all either in the process of studying how to reduce the use of solitary or have already done so. Legislation has just been introduced in Maryland to conduct a review of state and local correctional facilities relating to isolated confinement.

We are not aware of any studies that demonstrate that the use of prolonged isolation improves prison security, saves taxpayer monies and is humane or improves prisoner behavior. There are ample studies that show that prolonged isolation increases costs, exacerbates mental illness and results in higher recidivism rates from those released from solitary to the community.

As a country once known for human rights, the United States must address this issue. We already incarcerate more prisoners than any other country. We must not also torture them.

Submitted by Suzanne O’Hatnick, Chair of IAHR  
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