Torture compromised integrity of the United States

Letter to the Editor

January 30

The Daily News

L.A. Times

Letters: The hunger strike

June 10

The New York Times

Letter in US Prisons

June 20

The Washington Post

Torture in US Prisons

June 20

NRCAT WAS THERE

PEOPLE OF FAITH

ENDING TORTURE

Online at NRCAT.org  @NRCATTweets  facebook.com/nrcat
Promoting human rights rooted in human dignity

Working to end torture in U.S. policy, practice and culture

Founded in 2006
National interfaith membership organization

Representatives from the Catholic, evangelical Christian, mainline Protestant, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Baha’i, Buddhist, Unitarian Universalist, Quaker, and Sikh communities

Members include national denominations and faith groups, regional organizations and local congregations
Principles guiding interfaith work to end solitary confinement:

Following the leadership of those most impacted by solitary confinement and mass incarceration

Restorative Justice

Mental health implications

Recommendation of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture: prohibit solitary beyond 15 days, ban it for the most vulnerable

Impact of solitary on incarcerated people, families, correctional staff

Human rights and human dignity

Racial justice

The Mandela Rules

Public Safety
Sitawa Nantambu
Jamaa and his sister,
Marie Levin
Leading the movement: Survivors of Solitary and their Families

“This victory was achieved by the efforts of people in prison, their families and loved ones, lawyers, and outside supporters. Our movement rests on a foundation of unity: our (2012) Agreement to End Hostilities.

It is our hope that this groundbreaking agreement to end the violence between the various ethnic groups in California prisons will inspire not only state prisoners, but also jail detainees, county prisoners and our communities on the street, to oppose ethnic and racial violence. From this foundation, the prisoners’ human rights movement is awakening the conscience of the nation to recognize that we are fellow human beings.”

--Plaintiffs in the Ashker v. Brown federal class action suit, respond to the historic settlement. Learn more here.
“We stand opposed to this treatment because it is not restorative...International human rights standards consider more than 15 days in isolation to be torture. The world is watching...”

Bishop Richard Garcia, Chairman of the Restorative Justice Committee of the California Conference of Catholic Bishops and Bishop of the Diocese of Monterey (July 12, 2013)

*Read the full statement [here.](#)*
Resolution 1525 – A Call to End Solitary Confinement

Approval of Proposal for Reflection and Research: During the 2015-2017 biennium, a reflection and research process accountable by report to the Administrative Committee, the General Board, and the 2017 General Assembly

To encourage the church to engage in reflection, prayer, education, and possible action around the practice of solitary confinement of incarcerated youth and adults.

Disciples’ congregations and prison and jail ministries will serve as venues where discussion, discourse and discernment can occur as we examine and explore the issue of solitary confinement.

Full text available here.
Catholic Mobilizing Network web tool about solitary confinement, available [here](#).

Pope Francis has spoken out powerfully for the rights of incarcerated people, calling “confinement in high security prisons” a form of torture and saying that torture is “a grave sin, but even more, it is a sin against humanity.”

The US Catholic Bishops, in *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* (November 15, 2000) wrote, “We oppose the increasing use of isolation units, especially in the absence of due process, and the monitoring and professional assessment of the effects of such confinement on the mental health of inmates.” [Read more](#).

The hearing was the **first time** Congress specifically addressed solitary confinement.

NRCAT members attended the hearing in D.C., and hundreds more joined in a **nationwide fast for 23 hours** prior to the hearing - symbolizing the 23 hours incarcerated people spend in solitary confinement cells per day.

**Hundreds of people of faith across the nation participated in fasting, to urge Congress to act.**
On February 25, 2014 the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights hosted a hearing:


More than 15 religious organizations submitted testimony for the record.

NRCAT co-sponsored a gathering of national faith leaders, survivors of solitary confinement and their families, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, in advance of the hearing. Video and testimony [here](#).
Torture in U.S. Prisons: Interfaith Religious Coalition Calls for End to Widespread Use of Prolonged Solitary Confinement

September 2014

A Shadow Report Prepared for the United Nations Committee Against Torture in Connection to its Review of the United States Compliance with the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Full report available here.
Dear Mr. President:
It’s time to stop solitary.

Over 20 national religious organizations – including the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), the Union for Reform Judaism, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, and the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church – joined the call for the White House to ensure the nationwide review outlines a clear path toward ending long-term solitary confinement.

On Oct 1, 2015:

126 Organizations, including 39 Religious Organizations, delivered an open letter to the White House calling for the President to ensure the DOJ’s nationwide review of solitary includes a clear path to the elimination of long-term isolation.

Full text of the letter is available here.
More states passed solitary confinement reforms in 2014 than in the past 16 years.
Humane Alternatives to Long Term (HALT) SOLITARY CONFINEMENT ACT

Key Components of the bill include:

Creating alternatives to Isolated confinement for any person separated from general population for more than 15 continuous days. It requires they must be in a separate secure residential rehabilitation unit (RRU) — a rehabilitative and therapeutic unit aimed at providing additional programs, therapy, and support to address underlying needs and causes of behavior, with 6 hours per day of out-of-cell programming plus 1 hour of out-of-cell recreation.

Ending long-term Isolated confinement, establishing a standard that no person may be held in isolated confinement more than 15 consecutive days nor 20 days total in any 60 day period. At these limits, a person must be released or diverted to the alternative RRU with more out-of-cell time, programs, and therapy.
Resolution opposing the Use of Prolonged Solitary Confinement in the Correctional Facilities of New York State and New York City

“We believe that God created human beings with an inherent dignity to be respected at all times and in all places. We believe that the image of God, the human worth of every person, is nurtured, fulfilled and held accountable only in relationship, in human community. Therefore, we believe that prolonged isolation imposed on any person is inhumane, torturous, degrading to the human spirit, and contrary to the will of God.”

The New York State Council of Churches hereby resolves: “To call on New York legislators to pass the Humane Alternatives to Long Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, to ensure that the torture of solitary confinement is ended forever in New York.”

Full statement available here.
SB 124, a bill to address the solitary confinement of youth in the juvenile justice system

SB 124 would bring these urgently needed reforms in California:

- Define solitary confinement as the placement of a person in a locked room or cell alone with minimal or no contact with persons other than guards, correctional staff, and attorneys.

- Provide that solitary confinement shall only be used when a young person poses an immediate and substantial risk of harm to others or the security of the facility, and when all other less restrictive options have been attempted and exhausted.

- Provide that a youth shall only be held in solitary confinement for the minimum time necessary to address the safety risk, not to exceed four hours.

- Empower existing county juvenile justice commission
Standing together for accountability
WISDOM Wisconsin, a grassroots organization, comprised mostly of religious congregations of many denominations, including 160 congregations, of 19 different religious traditions, which works to have a common voice on issues of social justice.
Wisconsin, a grassroots organization, comprised mostly of religious congregations of many denominations, including 160 congregations, of 19 different religious traditions, which works to have a common voice on issues of social justice.
Design and construction of the NRCAT replica solitary confinement cell is made possible through partnership with The Prison Ministry Project, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Madison, WI and WISDOM Wisconsin.
“After just a few minutes in solitary, I began looking at the brick wall, wondering how solid it was, how those lines fit together. I heard the sounds of banging and cries, and couldn't decide whether to wish it would stop, or whether complete silence would be more terrifying. No blanket. Not a single soft thing, other than my own body. Turning harder by the moment. How would I live if this were my whole world for days? Weeks? Months? Years?”

Rev. Lee, participant at Ecumenical Advocacy Days, April 17-20, 2015
Reflections from the replica

“When is day? When is night? When is time? Does it really exist? Are we really human? Am I human? How do I know that I am human? And what of the people who have done this to me? Do they know that I am here? What are they? How can I reach them? Do I exist for them? The voices outside have drowned out. I can only hear this incessant banging.

What is time? Is it five minutes? Is it ten? There is no handle. I can only survive if I keep writing; writing blocks everything out. What if I had no pen? What is freedom then? Will it come? Does it exist? I was only in for ten minutes and see what it did to me.”

Participant at Ecumenical Advocacy Days, April 17-20, 2015
Ecumenical Advocacy Days
Washington D.C.
Islamic Circle of North American Annual Convention
Baltimore, Maryland
Nationwide Actions on the 23rd of each month

Communities across the country are joining Together to End Solitary Confinement.

On the 23rd of every month, join people throughout the U.S. who are holding monthly actions to call for an end to the torture of solitary, at the recommendation of people incarcerated in Pelican Bay prison who led the momentous hunger strikes in California prisons.

Together we can end the torture of solitary confinement and make human rights a reality for all people. #together

Learn more at: togethertoendsolitary.org
nrcat.org/breakingdownthebox
Breaking Down the Box

40 minute documentary and interfaith discussion guide available at:

nrcat.org/breakingdownthebox
Contact: NRCAT Director, U.S. Prisons Policy & Program
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NRCAT | National Religious Campaign Against Torture
If you have questions or want more information on how you or your ministry can respond, welcome and engage, contact:

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Thank you to our co-sponsors:

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