



Message to Supporters from the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition

October 2012

Dear Supporter,

Our coalition was formed in 2011 to support the thousands of prisoners in California who joined a non-violent hunger strike to draw attention to the torturous conditions of solitary confinement. The hunger strike was a bold display of unity across racial, geographic and social barriers among prisoners and their families.

The hunger strike was called for by a group of men who have been held in extreme isolation for decades in the Security Housing Unit of California's notorious Pelican Bay State Prison. They organized the protest to raise awareness about the use of long term solitary confinement in California. They issued five reasonable demands aimed at ending this inhumane practice.

One year after the end of the hunger strike, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has failed to adequately address these reasonable demands. Thousands of prisoners who participated were written up with disciplinary violations for participating in what CDCR termed a "mass disturbance". Many have faced other forms of retaliation such as poor medical attention and interference with family visits and letters.

Despite these obstacles and retaliatory actions, the men at Pelican Bay are still united and committed to improving conditions for themselves and all prisoners. Last year, they showed the world the profound impact that people in prison can have when they unite to create change. They are now working to bring disparate groups together to effectively advocate for their human rights.

One major obstacle to unity in California's prisons has been the 30-40 years of racial and group hostilities among prisoners. These disputes have a long history, and were often created and further exacerbated by correctional officers and the racialized structure of prison policies and administration. In recognition of the urgent need to set aside these long standing disputes to create state-wide unity, the men at Pelican Bay have issued an agreement to end racial and group hostilities within California's prisons and jails.

We encourage you to read and share this historically significant agreement. Also visit www.prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com to stay informed about the latest developments and to find ways to support this important human rights movement against long term solitary confinement.

In solidarity,

Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition
Oakland, California

Note: This letter and list of definitions are separate from the Agreement to End Hostilities. They were written by the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition to provide context for the Agreement to End Hostilities.



Definitions of Terms used in the Agreement to End Hostilities

PBSP – Pelican Bay State Prison is a super-max prison in Northern California near Oregon. The SHU at Pelican Bay houses over 1,000 people in solitary confinement. There are at least 3,000 prisoners in solitary confinement in other prisons throughout the state in other facilities.

SHU – Security Housing Unit. These are the units that house people in solitary confinement/extreme isolation. The decision to house someone in the SHU is made by correctional officers, not a court. People who are isolated in the SHU spend a minimum of 23 hours a day alone in a windowless cell. Many have been there for decades. They are not allowed any phone calls and their visits with family members are limited to one or two hours each week if their families have the means to travel for 8 hours (from the Bay area) or 16 hours (from Los Angeles). All of their correspondence is read by correctional officers and often delayed or rejected from being delivered. Some people are isolated here for definite terms, meaning they have a set release date, but most are there for indefinite terms, based on faulty gang validations, with no real options to be released.

Corridor – A reference to the “Short Corridor” – a part of the SHU where the most influential prisoners, and many skilled jailhouse lawyers, are held. The call for the hunger strike and the agreement to end racial hostilities came from the men housed in the short corridor. These men sometimes refer to themselves as the “Short Corridor Collective”.

Ad-Seg – Administrative Segregation Units also hold people in solitary confinement. These units are even more restrictive than the SHU is and were originally intended for short term isolation, but are often used as “overflow” for the SHU when it is at capacity.

General Population – Also referred to as GP, where the majority of the prisoners (who are not in solitary confinement) are housed.

IGI – Refers to the Institutional Gang Investigators. These are units of officers in each prison who are responsible for identifying alleged prison gang affiliates. These units define what is considered gang activity in CA prisons. Often times, much of what they consider gang related is actually cultural or political in nature. The IGI also solicits information from “debriefers” and confidential informants to be used to validate other prisoners. IGI has a history of designating hundreds of men as prison gang affiliates solely based on the possession of cultural or political material and “confidential information”.

ISU – The Investigative Services Unit is another unit that is responsible for investigating criminal and gang activity.

SSU – Is the Special Services Unit. This group investigates organized crime among prisoners and parolees. They often collaborate with other law enforcement agencies such as the FBI and local police and sheriffs.

OCS – The Office of Correctional Safety is based at the CDCR headquarters and is responsible for overseeing the IGI, ISU, and SSU. The OSC must approve all the validation packages that are created by the IGI before a prisoner can be sent to the SHU based on gang validation. They routinely rubber-stamp the validations without investigation or inquiry into the prisoners’ appeals or actual activity.

SNY – Refers to the Sensitive Needs Yard. Prisoners who may be in danger in the general population are housed here. This includes some prisoners who have “debriefed” in order to be released from the SHU.

Debriefing – This is currently the only way for validated prison gang members to be released from the SHU when they are serving an indefinite term. In order to successfully debrief, a prisoner must denounce the gang and participate in an interview with the IGI in which the prisoner is required to tell everything he knows about the gang. Prisoners who participate in this process put their lives (and their families) in danger by accusing other prisoners of being gang affiliates. The information obtained in these interviews is used to validate other prisoners as gang member and to send them to the SHU for indefinite terms. Debriefing is not an option for many prisoners because of the danger involved and if they were improperly validated then they are not actual gang members and cannot give adequate information for the process.

CCPOA – The California Correctional Peace Officers Union is the very powerful prison guards union. They are sometimes called the “4th branch of government” in California due to their extreme power and influence in CA politics.

The Representatives Body – A larger group of men in Pelican Bay SHU who are well respected representatives of various racial & geographical groups in CA prisons.

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