



National Religious Campaign Against Torture

TORTURE IS A MORAL ISSUE

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Religious coalition responds to first-ever Congressional hearing on prolonged solitary confinement

Hundreds of religious leaders and people of faith nationwide conclude 23-hour fast drawing attention to the harm caused by prolonged solitary confinement

Washington, D.C. – A group of religious leaders today ended a 23-hour nationwide fast at 12 p.m. at the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill, interceding on behalf of the tens of thousands of American prisoners currently housed in solitary confinement across the country. The fast was held in conjunction with a Senate hearing on the use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons. Today's hearing was the first time Congress has explored this issue.

The religious leaders who were gathered in Washington represented hundreds of people of faith across the country who took part in the National Religious Campaign Against Torture's "23-Hour Fast to End 23-Hour Solitary." The length of the fast symbolized the 23 hours per day inmates are typically required to spend in solitary confinement cells. As evidenced by recent prisoner hunger strikes in Virginia and California, refusing food is one of the few means prisoners across the country have to protest their conditions in solitary confinement. The fast was intended to draw attention to the physical, emotional and psychological harm caused by prolonged solitary confinement.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture has been effective in its efforts to limit the use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons. Rev. Richard Killmer, Executive Director of NRCAT, issued the following statement in response to today's hearing:

The Subcommittee's evaluation of the impact of the federal system's use of solitary confinement on prisoners, correctional staff, our budget, and society at large, clearly demonstrates that the pervasive use of prolonged solitary confinement is wrong both morally and economically.

Tens of thousands of prisoners across the nation are held 23 or even 24 hours a day in small cells with no natural light and no meaningful contact with staff or other prisoners. We confine people in these isolated conditions for weeks, years, even decades on end,

despite research consistently demonstrating that the severe psychological effects, particularly among children and the mentally ill, are devastating.

The inherent God-given dignity of each human being does not disappear once behind prison gates. Our fast is only a means to be faithful to God's calling for justice, but it is not our end. Our hunger for change will not let up until we see an end to this horror.

We give thanks that we are breaking bread after the first-ever Congressional hearing on solitary confinement. However, we pray that Congress not only reassesses solitary confinement, but like a growing number of states across the nation, takes significant action toward ending this harmful, costly, and ineffective practice.



A group of religious leaders of various faiths come together June 19, 2012, at the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., to break bread to end a 23-hour fast demonstrating opposition to prolonged solitary confinement. The fast was organized by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, and hundreds of people of faith across the country participated. The breaking of the fast followed the end of the first ever Congressional hearing on solitary confinement. From left to right: Rev. Richard Killmer, Executive Director, National Religious Campaign Against Torture; Rabbi Rachel Kahn-Troster, Director of North American Programs, Rabbis for Human Rights-North America; Dave Loudon, Chief of Staff, Justice Fellowship/Prison Fellowship Ministries; Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson

II, Director, Presbyterian Church and Office of Public Witness; and Linda Gustitus, President, National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

Credit: Ron Sachs

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) is a membership organization committed to ending U.S.-sponsored torture, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Since its formation in January 2006, 315 religious organizations have joined NRCAT, including representatives from the Catholic, evangelical Christian, mainline Protestant, Unitarian Universalist, Quaker, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i, Buddhist, and Sikh communities. Members include national denominations and faith groups, regional organizations and local congregations. More information is available at www.nrcat.org. View NRCAT's 20-minute film, "Solitary Confinement: Torture in Your Backyard," by visiting www.nrcat.org/backyard.

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