

Day 60 Mediation Team Statement: September 5, 2013

The Mediation Team is pleased to confirm that the 20 prisoner representatives, of all the ethnic groups involved in the hunger strike, have decided to suspend the strike on the 60th day. This result comes after huge sacrifice on the part of scores of prisoners –upwards of 40 people went without solid foods for eight and a half weeks. Thousands more went on and off in the two-month period, and thirty thousand participated.

This hunger strike is historic on many levels: the number of prisoners who went without food; the international media attention; and the impressive mobilization of groups on the outside who published in-depth analyses, organized demonstrations, worked with the media, and promoted the prisoners' demands and their Agreement to End Hostilities. Coupled with the lawsuit by the Center for Constitutional Rights and other attorneys, this peaceful protest was a tremendously courageous effort that has the potential of securing real change in California's practices related to solitary confinement.

The breakthrough began with a joint statement issued last Friday by Senator Loni Hancock and Assemblymember Tom Ammiano validating the prisoners' position and calling for Public Safety Committee hearings (as early as fall) and legislative action to address widespread abuses. Although there have been hearings in the Assembly twice before, prisoners believed that the strong statement of support for their demands from the chairs of the Senate and Assembly Public Safety Committees constituted grounds for hope.

The joint statement of Senator Hancock and Assemblymember Ammiano reads in part: "The issues raised by the hunger strike are real... and can no longer be ignored." Assemblymember Ammiano said further, "The Courts have made clear that the hunger strikers have legitimate issues of policy and practice that must be reviewed. The Legislature has a critical role in considering and acting on their concerns. We cannot sit by and watch our state pour money into a system that the US. Supreme Court has declared does not provide constitutionally acceptable conditions of confinement and that statistics show has failed to increase public safety."

The legislative call was just one of several signs of progress the prisoners noted. CDCR officials, who refused to negotiate on any demands during the strike, did meet with the prisoners in person or by phone, to listen to them and seek resolution. Mike Stainer, Director of Adult Institutions, promised to travel to Pelican Bay on the week of September 23 to discuss with the prisoner representatives their demands and new CDCR policies being developed on gang validation and SHU placement. One prisoner described such meetings as "historic."

The Mediation Team is hopeful that today marks the beginning of finding ways to redress prisoners' grievances short of starvation. The 602 process used by the CDCR for individual complaints is completely broken and new avenues must be put into place. We herald this day as the beginning of a new understanding that prisoners are human beings, with legitimate rights, and the realization that when the state restricts some freedoms, it also assumes responsibilities to

treat people justly and humanely. The prisoners never asked to be released or even for shorter sentences. Rather, they asked to be free from isolation, to have regular contact with their families, meaningful activities, and livable conditions.

The Mediation Team was instrumental in organizing a phone call among our Team, the prisoner representatives at Pelican Bay, and CDCR officials on Tuesday, September 2nd, to open up the communication process. All who attended came away hopeful about the possibilities. The Mediation Team is in awe of the courage and leadership shown by all the prisoners who have sacrificed so much. We look forward to serving the process as it moves forward.

Hunger Strike Mediation Team

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