

Main reps mark the first anniversary of suspension of the 2013 Hunger Strike and the second anniversary of the Agreement to End Hostilities

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by Todd Ashker, Arturo Castellanos and George Franco

We expect to hear soon from Sitawa Nantambu Jamaa, the fourth of the main reps in the Pelican Bay SHU Short Corridor Collective Human Rights Movement. His remarks will be posted online as soon as they arrive and will be printed next month. He has been transferred to Tehachapi: C-35671, 4B-7C-209, P.O. Box 1906, Tehachapi CA 93581.

Greetings of solidarity and respect to all oppressed people and those committed to fighting for the fundamental right of all people to humane treatment – to dignity, respect and equality.

We are the prisoner class representatives of what's become known as the Pelican Bay State Prison SHU Short Corridor Collective Human Rights Movement. Last month we marked the first anniversary of the end of our historic 60-day Hunger Strike. Oct. 10 we mark the two-year anniversary of the Agreement to End Hostilities. This is an update on where things stand with our struggle to achieve major reforms beneficial to prisoners, outside loved ones and society in general.

Our Agreement to End Hostilities would enhance prison safety more than any long-term isolation policies and yet it still has not been circulated and posted throughout the prison system. We urge that everyone read this document again and that you pass it around, study it, live it. (It is reprinted below.) The California Department of Corrections has yet to post this historic document. It needs to.

In 2010 -2011, many long-term SHU prisoners housed in the PBSP SHU Short Corridor initiated our "collective human rights movement" based on our recognition that, regardless of color, we have all been condemned for decades, entombed in what are psycho-social extermination cells, based on prisoncrats' fascist mentality. That mentality is centered upon the growing oppressive agenda of the suppressive control of the working class poor and related prison industrial complex's expansion of supermax solitary confinement units.

The pretext for that expansion is baseless claims that solitary confinement is necessary for the subhuman "worst of the worst" deemed deserving of a long slow death in hellish conditions. Supermax units were originally designed and perfected for the purpose of destroying political prisoners and now extend to a policy of mass incarceration.

Beginning July 1, 2011, we have utilized our collective movement to resist and expose our decades of subjection to this systematic state torture, via a campaign of peaceful activism efforts inside and outside these dungeon walls. We have achieved some success; we are not finished.

Last month we marked the first anniversary of the end of our historic 60-day Hunger Strike. Oct. 10 we mark the two-year anniversary of the Agreement to End Hostilities.

We will not stop until there is no more widespread torturous isolation in California for ourselves and for those who will come after us. We remind all concerned that our third peaceful protest

action was “suspended” after 60 days, on Sept. 6, 2013, in response to Assemblyman Ammiano and Sen. Hancock’s courageous public acknowledgement of the legitimacy of our cause and related promises to hold joint hearings for the purpose of creating responsive legislation.

Hearings were held in October 2013 and February 2014 which were very positive for our cause in so far as continuing the public’s exposure to CDCR’s unjustifiable torture program. Assemblyman Ammiano’s bill was responsive to our issues and it was thus no surprise that the CDCR and CCPOA (the guards’ union) and others opposed it – and it was DOA on the Assembly floor. Sen. Hancock worked to get a bill passed with some changes, but, according to a statement she released, even that failed when the Governor’s Office and CDCR gutted months of work by Sen. Hancock, her staff and the staff of the Senate Public Safety Committee.

California Department of Corrections has calculated that their alleged “new” policy known as Security Threat Group-Step Down Program (STG-SDP) will give the appearance of addressing the horrific inhuman treatment we experience daily. They argue the Step Down Program is a major positive reform of the “old” policy and thereby responsive to our core demands.

They hope to undermine the statewide, national and international growing support for our cause – the end of long-term indefinite solitary confinement, the torture we experience year in and year out.

We will not stop until there is no more widespread torturous isolation in California for ourselves and for those who will come after us.

The STG-SDP is a smokescreen intended to enable prisoncrats to greatly expand upon the numbers held in solitary confinement – indefinitely. Their STG-SDP policy and program is a handbook to be used with limitless discretion to put whoever they want in isolation even without dangerous or violent behavior.

Their Security Threat Group policy and language are based on a prison punishment international homeland security worldview. By militarizing everything, just as they did in Ferguson, Missouri, poor working class communities, especially those of color, become communities that feed the police-prison industrial complex as a source of fuel.

The daily existence of poor people is criminalized from youth on. We become a source of revenue – a source of jobs – as our lives are sucked, tracked into the hell of endless incarceration, our living death. The STG-SDP is part of the worldview and language of death, not life. It is not positive reform. Security Threat Group takes social policy in the wrong direction.

CDCR is explicit in that thousands of us are in indefinite solitary because of who we are seen to be by them, not because we have done anything wrong. They still decide this by our art, our photographs, birthdays and confidential informants who get out of solitary by accusing the rest of us.

The only “program” in the Step Down Program is a mandatory requirement to fill out meaningless journals that have nothing to do with rehabilitation – rather, they are about petty hoops for longterm SHU prisoners to jump through. The step incentives are so small as to carry very little real value or meaning for a majority of prisoners. They don’t meet our Supplemental Demands.

In fact the SHU at Tehachapi, where they send Pelican Bay SHU prisoners who have “progressed” to “better steps” in the SDP, have less visiting, more filthy cells, horrible toxic water, no pillows, nasty mattresses, rags for cloths, used mattresses, loud noises and some officers who are brutal racists.

Some of the privilege opportunities we won for SHU prisoners as a result of our struggles exist only at Pelican Bay. Some mean a lot to us but, in the long view, are trivial.

We need to get rid of the “mandatory” aspect of the ridiculous journals. We need to touch our loved ones and they need to be touched by us. We need to hug our mothers, fathers, wives, children, brothers, sisters.

We need more packages and phone calls and photographs. We need the same canteen that general population gets. We need overnight family visits. Up until mid-1986, all SHU prisoners were allowed to receive contact visits.

Ultimately, we call for California to end the shame of their policy of solitary confinement for innocuous social interaction.

Prisoncrats propagate the 800-plus case-by-case reviews to date as evidence that their STG-SDP is a new program. The last statistics showed that almost 70 percent of prisoners reviewed were released to general population – including some of us who have been kept in these concrete boxes buried alive for decades.

These statistics prove something entirely different. They are factual data showing, proving that for decades 70-plus percent of us have been inappropriately confined, isolated and tortured.

It is CDCR’s senior people who are ruling that we have been inappropriately confined. These high release statistics prove without a doubt that the force of public condemnation, of united peaceful activity by those of us inside and our human rights supporters outside are required to keep CDCR from continuing their intolerable abuse.

We call for California to end the shame of their policy of solitary confinement for innocuous social interaction.

CDC argues that the transfer of Pelican Bay SHU prisoners to other SHUs at Corcoran, New Folsom or Tehachapi SHU cells or to various general population prisons proves they have taken measures to address the horrors and inappropriate use of SHU. In fact, even with the large numbers of prisoners being transferred out of SHU cells, there are no empty SHU cells.

Across the system prisoners are being validated for art, innocuous social interaction and for lies and misrepresentations about our mail by confidential informants who escape the SHU themselves by accusing others of behavior that cannot be defended against because we are sent to the SHU for accusations that we do not know the specifics about!

We are isolated for confidential, uncorroborated “ghost” accusations with no due process review – because solitary isolation is categorized as an “administrative housing assignment” and not punishment. CDCR is filling up the SHU cells as fast as they are emptied.

CDCR administrators admitted in August 2011 that the programs and privileges sought in our demands were reasonable and should have been provided 20-plus years ago. Up until mid-1986, all SHU prisoners were allowed to receive contact visits, but no longer today. Why not?

CDCR hopes to destroy our sense of collective structure and our collective unity. We hope to expand our sense of collectivity as we spread out. We work to keep all opinions open, to think through new ideas and options for peaceful activity to shut down the reckless use of isolation and other abuses.

California uses solitary isolation more than any other state in the United States, both in absolute numbers of prisoners isolated – 12,000 in some form of isolation on any given day – and in terms of percentage of the prison population. The United States uses solitary confinement more than any other country in the world – 80,000 prisoners in some form of isolation as part of the practice of mass incarceration and criminalization of life in poor communities.

CDCr cannot deny these facts. Our decades of indefinite SHU confinement and related conditions therein are what led us to peacefully rise up and make our stand as a united collective of human beings – and we have been clear about our opposition to the Security Threat Group-Step Down Program. The prisoner class human rights movement is growing and we've succeeded in exposing this nation's penal system torture program – nationally and internationally.

This mainstream level of attention and global support for the prisoners' cause is unprecedented and it will continue to grow – so long as we all remain united and committed to doing our part.

Our peaceful actions have demonstrated that we are not powerless and the concrete fact is that the operation of these prisons requires the cooperation of the prisoners – thus, the prisoners do have the power to make beneficial reforms happen when we are united in utilizing non-violent, peaceful methods such as hunger strike-work stoppage protests and forms of non-cooperation.

We are thinking about how to extend this power peacefully across the prison system to make these institutions more focused on rehabilitation, learning and growing so that our return to our communities helps us all. Following and living by the principles in the Agreement to End Hostilities can help make this happen.

With the above in mind, we remind all interested parties that this ongoing struggle for reform is a “human rights movement,” comprised of united prisoners, outside loved ones and supporters. The PBSP SHU Short Corridor Collective Human Rights Movement's 20 volunteer representatives remain united, committed and determined about achieving the Five Core and Forty Supplemental Demands and the principle goals of the August 2012 “Agreement to End Hostilities,” with the support of all like-minded members of the prisoner class, outside loved ones and supporters.

Our primary goal remains that of ending long-term solitary confinement (in SHU and ad seg). This goal is at the heart of our struggle.

California uses solitary isolation more than any other state in the United States. The United States uses solitary confinement more than any other country in the world.

Along the way we are also committed to improving conditions in SHU, ad seg and general prison population. We make clear that any policy that maintains the status quo related to the placement and retention of prisoners into SHU and ad seg cells indefinitely is not acceptable – regardless of what programs or privileges are provided therein.

We have rejected CDCR’s Security Threat Group-Step Down Program and presented our reasonable counter proposal for the creation of a modified general population type program for the purpose of successful transitions between SHU and general population. CDCR’s top administrators have refused to negotiate, insisting upon moving forward with their STG-SDP. We are evaluating options.

Again, we need an end to the “mandatory” aspect of the ridiculous journals. We need to touch our loved ones and they need to be touched by us. Until mid-1986, all SHU prisoners were allowed to receive contact visits. There is no legitimate basis for not allowing them now.

We celebrate the brothers who are getting out of the SHU after decades of confinement and understand the willingness to participate in the current CDCr charade.

We recognize those brothers in Corcoran who are refusing to participate in the SDP.

We’ve patiently observed the political process at issue for the past year, since such was the basis for “suspending” our 2013 action, and it’s becoming clear that those in power are still not seeing us as human because they refuse to end long term solitary confinement – in spite of international condemnation – ensuring the continuation of such psycho-social extermination policies.

Lawmakers’ refusal to abolish indefinite solitary confinement in response to the established record of abuse and related damage it causes to prisoners, outside loved ones and society in general – supported by the record of the joint Public Safety Committee hearings – supports our position that we are subjected to systematic, state sanctioned torture. This is a permanent stain upon this nation’s human rights record. Their continued refusal will require us to re-evaluate all of our available peaceful options.

Keeping all of the above points in mind, we respectfully encourage people inside and outside these walls to commemorate this two-year anniversary of the Agreement to End Hostilities by joining with us in living by these principles inside and outside these prison walls.

We remain united, onward in struggle, always in solidarity.

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Agreement to End Hostilities

To whom it may concern and all California prisoners:

Greetings from the entire PBSP SHU Short Corridor Hunger Strike Representatives. We are hereby presenting this mutual agreement on behalf of all racial groups here in the PBSP SHU Corridor. Wherein, we have arrived at a mutual agreement concerning the following points:

If we really want to bring about substantive meaningful changes to the CDCR system in a manner beneficial to all solid individuals who have never been broken by CDCR's torture tactics intended to coerce one to become a state informant via debriefing, now is the time for us to collectively seize this moment in time and put an end to more than 20-30 years of hostilities between our racial groups.

Therefore, beginning on Oct. 10, 2012, all hostilities between our racial groups in SHU, ad-seg, general population and county jails will officially cease. This means that from this date on, all racial group hostilities need to be at an end. And if personal issues arise between individuals, people need to do all they can to exhaust all diplomatic means to settle such disputes; do not allow personal, individual issues to escalate into racial group issues!

We also want to warn those in the general population that IGI (Institutional Gang Investigators) will continue to plant undercover Sensitive Needs Yard (SNY) debriefer "inmates" amongst the solid GP prisoners with orders from IGI to be informers, snitches, rats and obstructionists, in order to attempt to disrupt and undermine our collective groups' mutual understanding on issues intended for our mutual causes. People need to be aware and vigilant to such tactics and refuse to allow such IGI inmate snitches to create chaos and reignite hostilities amongst our racial groups. We can no longer play into IGI, ISU, (Investigative Service Unit), OCS (Office of Correctional Safety) and SSU's (Service Security Unit's) old manipulative divide and conquer tactics!

In conclusion, we must all hold strong to our mutual agreement from this point on and focus our time, attention and energy on mutual causes beneficial to all of us prisoners and our best interests. We can no longer allow CDCR to use us against each other for their benefit!

Because the reality is that, collectively, we are an empowered, mighty force that can positively change this entire corrupt system into a system that actually benefits prisoners and thereby the public as a whole, and we simply cannot allow CDCR and CCPOA, the prison guards' union, IGI, ISU, OCS and SSU to continue to get away with their constant form of progressive oppression and warehousing of tens of thousands of prisoners, including the 14,000-plus prisoners held in solitary confinement torture chambers – SHU and ad-seg units – for decades!

The reality is that, collectively, we are an empowered, mighty force that can positively change this entire corrupt system into a system that actually benefits prisoners and thereby the public as a whole.

We send our love and respect to all those of like mind and heart. Onward in struggle and solidarity!

Presented by the PBSP SHU Short Corridor Collective: Todd Ashker, Arturo Castellanos, Sitawa Nantambu Jamaa (Dewberry) and Antonio Guillen; and the Representatives Body: Danny

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