

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

Vol. 48-E, No. 5

PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504

June 2023

SUMMER IN PRISON

In Support of Victims of Torture

The International Day in Support of Victims of Torture was observed this year on June 26. A new report was released on the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms detailing conditions at the U.S. prison detention facility at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. The report is a strong call for international bodies and governments to cooperate in a global effort to close this prison, which stands as a symbol of torture and an extreme violation of human rights.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) has —to date unsuccessfully—been pressuring the U.S. to close the Guantanamo prison since the Campaigns' founding in 2006. This is based on its understanding that the prison stands as a symbol of torture and an extreme violation of human rights and that its closing would work reduce and create pressure to end torture in U.S. policy, practice and culture.

June 26 is the anniversary of the day in 1987 that the UN Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment came into effect, with the assistance of many nations around the world.

For further information, contact:
Ron Stief
Executive Director
National Religious Campaign
Against Torture
P.O. Box 91820
Washington DC 20090

Climate Change: More Prison Deaths

In Texas, 70% of the prisons lack air conditioning in cells and in common areas. The rest of the U.S. is not much better. And, as we know, prisons have in them a growing number of people with medical conditions and mental-health concerns that make them particularly susceptible to heat-related illnesses.

Yet, on the inside, water often isn't available 24/7. Showers are limited. Uniforms are required. If you want a fan, you have to buy it from the prison commissary. Research reports that summertime mortality rates in U.S. and for-profit prisons over the past two decades have found that the death rate has risen by 5.% for every 10 degree increase in temperature above historical averages. This resulted in 635 prison deaths nationally due to high heat since 2001. In Texas, 271 prisoners dying in non-air-conditioned state prisons were reported between 2001 and 2019.

Of course, it is not only the imprisoned who are in miserable conditions. The prison workers, including the administration, the wardens and the medical staff are too. Tensions are high. Violence goes up. Suicides increase.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is predicting a hotter-than-average summer for broad swaths of the U.S. Over the next 5 years, temperatures are likely to soar to record highs due to a combination of human-caused global warming and the El Nino weather pattern. Predictions are that the number of days per year above 105 F. will quadruple by mid-century. By the end of the century, thousands of U.S. prisons will know the kind of heat Texas has today.

"SOLITO" DE MEMORIAS DEL VIAJE A EE.UU.

El presidente estadounidense esta poniendo fin a la política migratoria basada en el Titulo 42 del Código de Regulaciones Federales, establecida por el Gobierno de Trump durante la pandemia para impedir el ingreso de solicitantes de asilo, pero planea implementar restricciones mas fuertes en la frontera El libro del poeta salvadoreño, Javier Zamora narra la odisea que Zamora vivio a sus 9 anos cuando viajo sin su familia hacia el norte y, con la ayuda de otros migrantes, atravesó Guatemala, Mexico y, finalmente el desierto de Sonora, para poder llegar a Arizona y reunirse con su madre y padre. "Somos simplemente seres humanos que buscamos la oportunidad de tener una vida mejor" el dice.

THE LEAST READ PART OF THE NEWSLETTER

To receive the CPR Newsletter by postal mail monthly, send us a self-addressed stamped envelope for each month's issue you are requesting. Five pages (= 1 ounce), can be sent for one Forever stamp. Ten pages (= 2 ounces and can be sent for a 20 cent stamp more.)

Please continue to send us your address changes, including both your old and new addresses.

NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS. Letters sent to us marked "Legal Mail" are NOT going to a lawyer. PLEASE DO NOT MARK YOUR MAIL "LEGAL MAIL"! NO MATTER HOW DESPERATELY YOU NEED LEGAL ADVICE/ ASSISTANCE, WE DO NOT HAVE ANY.

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons Project, which posts our Newsletter on-line, monthly, for free downloading and distribution. All issues since 2009 are on its great site: realcostofprisons.org

Fear of Books

We are interested in collecting information on how the reading of books may have harmed any of our readers. There are a lot of opinions and decisions by those in charge of what books are made available to who and about how books might be harmful to readers. But we know of NO situations where people feel they have been harmed by reading certain books. Please let us know if you are a person. who feels they have been harmed in that way. In the meantime, if you feel reading a certain book is actually bad for you: STOP reading it.

One can always go back to a book not enjoyed the first time around. . .

Keeping Secrets

The state of New Mexico has an "Inspection of Public Records Act." According to local civil rights attorneys the state "Corrections Department" is one of the biggest offenders in the state in its lack of compliance with this Act. According to a local newspaper, "The agency has a practice of creating policies deeming records confidential—including other policies—which is one of many ways it shields from public view what happens inside prison walls." Opinions vary about whether such actions are an intentional effort to block information. The "Corrections Department" maintains it, in fact puts a lot of effort into "protecting the population (it is) responsible for."

There are currently several lawsuits pending against the "Corrections Department" which accuse the agency of using several tactics to shirk its responsibilities under the records law. They include:

> Directing people seeking public record to private companies that provide services in prisons through state contracts. Such firms often argue they aren't subject to the law.

> Overly redacting and underdelivering requested documents.

> Repeatedly citing a need for more time to provide requested documents.

> Providing no response to a request. The New Mexico Prison and Jail Project, which represents prisoners in legal actions, reports that they often receive only partial responses to records requests and only learn this is the case after their lawsuit filed that the Department has more documents that it failed to provide. Advocates maintain that while the corrections department is not actively obstructing the public's access to public records, it is in fact passively violating the law.

Prisoners' attorneys also question whether the Correction Department consistently complies with the basic requirement that they have a designated records custodian. The last one known of in New Mexico left in August of last year. The Prison and Jail Project, which represents prisoners in legal actions, states than there are larger implications for society as a whole when prison records are shielded from view: "It really does get to the root of why mass incarceration continues to exist in the United State. . . Officials within the system get comfortable with being able to operate outside the light of public scrutiny—and they get away with it."