

**PA House Judiciary Committee Hearing
Monday, August 2, 2010 at 1:00
Solitary Confinement
Yeadon Borough Hall
600 Church Lane, Yeadon, PA 19050III**

**Testimony By: LUQMAN M. ABDULLAH
(Pennsylvania Solitary Confinement Survivor)**

Dear Chairman Thomas R. Caltagirone and Members of the PA House Judiciary Committee:

My name is LuQman M. Abdullah, and I am a Social Worker, Prison Care Outreach Specialist for Philadelphia FIGHT, Human Rights Coalition (Founding Member) and the Senior Vice President of Back To Society (BTS), Inc.

I am a former Political Conscious Prisoner who has served over 23 ½ years of my life in some of Pennsylvania's worst prisons (SCI Greene, SCI Fayette, SCI Rockview, SCI Dallas, SCI Graterford) with 5 of those years spent in solitary confinement (isolation/long term lock down).

On behalf of Prisoners who remain in solitary confinement, former solitary confinement survivors, family members and the community at large, I LUQMAN MATIN ABDULLAH, formerly known as (Leonard Hayes) present my personal testimony of my experience being abused, tortured, framed, and held in solitary confinement at SCI Rockview, SCI Greene and SCI Dallas during the years of 1993 thru 1998.

SCI Rockview

Beginning in 1993 while housed at SCI Rockview I became a target of the prison administration due to my political views, historical and cultural awareness, which eventually lead to the administration placing me in solitary confinement. I had chosen to spend my time educating myself, and younger prisoners on self values, self empowerment, and the need for transformation of the mind.

In 1993, I was removed from general population and taken to the RHU (Restricted Housing Unit) for unauthorized group activity (holding an educational study group). While in the RHU I was harassed by guards, having threats made on my life, called

**PA House Judiciary Committee Hearing
Monday, August 2, 2010 at 1:00
Solitary Confinement**

demeaning names, denied food, showers and yard exercise. After filing grievances which were always denied, I became even more of a target for harassment, abuse and torture. I was physically assaulted by guards while being escorted to the yard and or showers. It was also at this point, I began to lash out in a negative way throwing things out of the cell door slot. This led to guards coming into my cell with shields, stun guns and batons, beating me until I was almost unconscious, and near death. Also, during this time I had been in correspondence with the MOVE Family, remembering being questioned by the security office as to my affiliation with MOVE. Not too long after being questioned by the security office I was informed that I would not be released back into general population because of threats that were allegedly made by me, that if Mumia Abu Jamal was executed I was going to burn the jail down (this was a total lie), however, it was at this point I was placed on death wing where executions are conducted, in an observation cell stripped of all my prison issued clothing, the metal frame bed was stripped of the mattress and all accessories and I was placed on the metal frame in four point restraints, (meaning) both my arms were hand cuffed to opposite sides of the metal frame as well as both my legs.

Freezing cold air was blowing at full force 24 hours a day, with bright lights shining down on me. I was denied mail, even having my mail torn up in my face. My food was tampered with via spit and there was glass found in my food. I was tortured in this cell for 2 months, being released only to eat and use the bathroom.

SCI Greene

After being held in solitary confinement for over a year and a half at SCI Rockview, in late 1995-1996, I was transferred to SCI Greene, and after being at SCI Greene for about one year I was framed by Lt. Jon Tustin for allegedly threatening a Sergeant. Before I had a hearing on this false misconduct I was brutally beaten, called all kinds of nigger dogs by Lt. Jon Tustin, Charles Graner (Iraqi Prisoner Abuser) and four other guards that were members of their gang called the wolf pack, all of whom walked around the institution with one pants leg rolled up as a symbol of their brotherhood.

The sergeant I was accused of threatening was placed on my misconduct hearing list as my witness. At the hearing the sergeant gave testimony on my behalf that I had never been a problem and that I never made any threats towards her. I later received a letter from the prison that I would not be released into general population due to (my being a threat and danger to someone who could not be protected by alternative measures). I filed an appeal to the institution's decision with Camp Hill who granted my appeal, overturning SCI Greene's decision. After Camp Hill's overruling those of us on our

**PA House Judiciary Committee Hearing
Monday, August 2, 2010 at 1:00
Solitary Confinement**

housing unit such as Russell Maroon Shoatz who has been in solitary confinement now for over 30 years, Arthur Cetewayo Johnson and others became targets of greater oppression and harassment. Cell searches every day, being denied medical attention, food or served hot food cold, yard exercise and stripped of our reading materials, while housed in freezing cold cells.

I have witnessed guards at SCI Greene ram a baton up another prisoner's rectum, punch kick and stomp prisoners down to the ground until they were unconscious, as was done to me. I witnessed guards go into a prisoners cell who was due to be released from prison within two weeks, hearing what appeared to be fighting, guards later rushing out of the prisoner's cell, later whom was found hung to death in his cell by the second shift of guards.

SCI Dallas

After a year of mistreatment, harassment and abuse in freezing cold cells forcing us to drink hot water daily, wearing socks on our hands and pace the floors, jamming the hot water faucets for steam to keep warm, I was eventually transferred again, this time to SCI Dallas where I remained in solitary confinement for 6 months before being released into general population. I remained in general population for a total of 70 days, before I was targeted for harassment and locked down back into solitary confinement. (charges: unauthorized group activity). I was informed that I could not sit in the yard and discuss my religious beliefs with other prisoners which weren't the case for people who practiced religions (Christians, catholics, Jehovah witness, etc.) other than Islamic.

SCI Dallas had their own set of rules that seem to be different from all the other State Correctional Institutions. SCI Dallas administration used threats of never being released from prison if we did not denounce our Islamic beliefs, I was kicked down a flight of stairs by guards while being escorted to a grievances hearing due to not being given my mail and for filing private criminal complaints with the District Attorney's Office, on guards. Many days I went without eating because I was denied food or for the fear of being poisoned. Members of my religious community who were in isolation were denied to fast during observation of the month of Ramadan. Fourteen months was spent in solitary confinement at SCI Dallas, before I was transferred once again, this time to SCI Pittsburgh where I was finally released into general population.

**PA House Judiciary Committee Hearing
Monday, August 2, 2010 at 1:00
Solitary Confinement**

My Release and Effects of Solitary Confinement

On August 22, 2005 my maximum sentence was completed, freeing me from the criminal justice system. Since my release I've been a family preservation social worker for a youth agency, I'm employed as a Prison Outreach Specialist for a Comprehensive Aids Organization (Philadelphia FIGHT), Senior Vice President of Back To Society, Inc., mentor, lecturer, business development instructor, husband and the father of three beautiful children.

How Solitary Confinement Effected Me

At times I have an inability to tolerate ordinary stimuli: (sensitive to noise), panic attacks, difficulty in concentration and memory, overt paranoia, loss of impulse control, inability to tolerate restricted environmental stimulation, unable to tolerate routine and boredom, flashbacks, experienced intense irritation with social interaction. And, today, I continue to drink hot water and cannot tolerate cold environments with central air blowing.

Conclusion

Over the past two decades, solitary confinement has moved out of the prison basement and into whole facilities built just for isolation. These places have many names supermax, intensive-management units, secure housing – but the meaning is the same: years alone, out of the public view and away from public oversight. True solitary confinement - its general concept, ultimate purpose, and all of its myriad applications - must be exposed to as many concerned citizens as is possible. Media, cinema, and corrections spokespeople have all contributed to distorting our society's perception of this shameful and torturous practice that has been a facet of this country's history since its earliest years.

Isolation today means 23 hours a day in a concrete cell no bigger than a bathroom. One hour a day is spent alone in a concrete exercise pen, about the length and width of a dog kennel cage. Most prisoners held in solitary have no contact with the outside world other than the U.S. mail. Depending on the state, prisoners have limited access to visitors. Most can't watch television, call anyone on the phone or even touch another person while in the units.

Some prisoners have been incarcerated in these conditions in U.S. prisons for more than 20 years, such as Russell Maroon Shoatz, Jojo Bowen, Arthur Cetewayo Johnson, Alif Allah, Jabril Allah any many more. Most have been there for more than five years.

**PA House Judiciary Committee Hearing
Monday, August 2, 2010 at 1:00
Solitary Confinement**

It is a known fact that solitary confinement, for most prisoners, a stressful experience with potentially harmful health effects. The prisoner is socially isolated from others, his human contacts reduced to superficial transactions with staff and infrequent contact with family and friends. He is almost completely dependent on prison staff – even more than is usual in the prison setting – for the provision of all his basic needs and his few movements are tightly controlled and closely observed. Confined to a small sparsely furnished cell with little or no view of the outside world and with limited access to fresh air and natural light, he lives in an environment with little stimulation and few opportunities to occupy himself.

Throughout the long history of its use in prisons – from the ‘silent’ and ‘separate’ penitentiaries of the 19th century through to modern-day segregation units and ‘supermax’ prisons – practitioners and researchers have observed the adverse effects of solitary confinement on prisoners’ health. In the context of coercive interrogation, international experts have identified solitary confinement as psychological torture. The potentially damaging effects of solitary confinement are also recognized by national and international instruments and by monitoring bodies, which view it as an extreme prison practice which should only be used as a last resort and then only for short periods of time. Indeed, expressing strong concern about the use of solitary confinement as punishment, in 1990 the United Nations went as far as to call for its abolition.

I thank you all for giving me the time and your attention in this most serious matter, and I pray that change will come. Oppression is worst than slaughter!

Sincerely,

Mr. LuQman M. Abdullah

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