

Lowenstein Clinic Submission to UN Special Rapporteur on Torture

Yale Law School's Lowenstein Clinic for International Human Rights recently filed an allegation letter to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture in which they documented the use of solitary confinement and other abusive practices in Connecticut prisons and asked the Special Rapporteur to declare that these practices constitute torture. Attached to the Clinic's letter are statements from **15** men who are currently or were formerly incarcerated at Connecticut's supermax prison, Northern Correctional Institution. In their statements, they describe their experiences of neglect and abuse. The Clinic expects that the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, will respond to the submission by early summer.

What practices constitute torture, according to the submission?

1) Indefinite, punitive use of solitary confinement:

At Northern and other prisons, individuals in several restrictive housing statuses are kept in their cells 22-23 hours a day, for years on end in some cases. While in solitary confinement, they are denied adequate access to their loved ones or any significant programming to prepare them for life after release.

"Solitary Confinement: a never ending cesspool of destruction, despair, hopelessness, filth, constant noise, visual disruptions, mazelike atmosphere, violence, hate, death, loneliness, dehumanization, boredom, mental health breakdown, humiliation..."

- Mr. Leighton Johnson

2) Routine use of degrading and prolonged chaining:

At Northern, staff routinely put individuals in "in-cell restraints," in which individuals are shackled at the hands and feet, with a tether chain connecting the two chains. Prisoners on in-cell restraints are locked in cells with degrading conditions for a default of 24 hours and often for 72 hours.

"I was on in-cell restraints a bunch of times. I had to eat, sleep and use the bathroom while on in-cells. The experience was the worst and most horrifying experience I've ever been through. Overall, I feel as if I lost a piece of myself."

- Mr. Rasheim Lewis

3) Use of confinement and force in lieu of mental health treatment:

The Dept. of Correction imprisons mentally ill individuals at Northern. Rather than give them adequate treatment, DOC staff use chains and further deprivations when individuals attempt to harm themselves or in response to other behaviors that are symptomatic of their mental illness.

"I am a mentally ill inmate and my...problems [have worsened], and created new mental health disorders due to my conditions of confinement...at Northern I been allowed to bang my head on hard surfaces for years... from such actions my forehead and side of right-head is deformed"

- Mr. Jerome Riddick

What can you do to end these practices?

1) Join Stop Solitary Connecticut

Stop Solitary CT is working to improve the conditions of confinement for individuals held in solitary confinement across the state and, ultimately, to end and replace solitary with constructive alternatives.

2) Inform others about these human rights violations

Share the allegation letter with others in your community, and look out for media coverage of the Special Rapporteur's response in a couple weeks.

3) Call your representatives

Make sure that your state representatives and senators know about the abuses going on at Northern and beyond!