

California Prison Hunger Strikers Continue to Resist Despite the Threat of Force Feeding

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"We of course recognise that this is it - make or break time for us to make the long overdue change occur now - per our [core demands](#) and are thus in it for the long haul - the sacrifice is minor compared to what we've endured for 30 years!" Todd Ashker - prison hunger strike representative 44 days on hunger strike

As the hunger strike enters its eighth week California prison officials have got approval from a federal judge to force feed prisoners. Prison policy is to let prisoners starve to death if they have signed a do not resuscitate request. The judges ruling will allow a process called "refeeding" which could include forcing feeding tubes through prisoners' noses.

California prison authorities claimed to the federal judge that the hunger strike is 'orchestrated' by gangs who have intimidated men into going on hunger strike and signing do not resuscitate requests.

According to [Claude Marks](#) of the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition, "This order violates all international laws and standards and gives the medical director of each prison authority to violate human rights laws instead of reasonably negotiating with prisoners. This approach, much like Guantanamo, sets the US apart from all related international human rights standards."

[Jules Lobel](#), president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, who is representing ten 10 prisoners suing to end prolonged solitary confinement at Pelican Bay State Prison said, "Force-feeding violates international law to the extent that it involves somebody who doesn't give their consent."

Meanwhile, an appeal has been made to Juan E. Mendez U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture to intervene in the dispute. Peter Schey President and Executive Director Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law has written to Juan Mendez calling upon him to visit the prisoners in solitary confinement and prison authorities at Pelican Bay State Prison and thereafter issue guidance that will help end the various human rights violations.

In his [appeal Peter Schey](#) points out that this is a critical time as the physical and mental health of hunger strikers is deteriorating rapidly. He describes the brutal conditions facing the men who:

"continue to be locked in small concrete cells on average 23 hours a day, have no telephone privileges, very restricted family visits, no contact visits, unhealthy and inadequate food, no access to a fair process to assess the reasons for being placed in isolated segregation, inadequate mental health and medical services, sleep

deprivation, and numerous other dehumanizing conditions.”

Since the hunger strike has started the prison authorities have retaliated against hunger strikers by removing many from Secure Housing Units to Administrative Segregation where isolation-sensory deprivation is even more pronounced. Hunger strikers have been put into unfinished cells where freezing cold air comes out of the vents, there are no fire sprinklers and no power or cable hook ups for personal appliances.

The hunger strike is at a critical stage with 25 men having been transferred to Sacramento Medical Centre at New Folsom Prison where they continue their hunger strike. California prison authorities and medical staff have tried to dictate what kind of hunger strike the prisoners were on by denying them access to fruit /vegetable juices, vitamin and electrolyte supplements after the men declared that they were on a no solid food, no dairy product hunger strike. Lawyers for the hunger strikers have successfully intervened to force prison authorities to issue hunger strikers vitamins and low sodium low calorie Gatorade until their bodies can tolerate higher sugar content juices.

The prison authorities are collaborating with the FBI to break the hunger strike which is a major embarrassment for the prison authorities and Governor Brown as their barbaric treatment of prisoners is being increasingly exposed to growing numbers of people all over the world. [Arturo Castellanos](#), who is one of the four principal volunteer representatives at Pelican Bay State Prison (PBSP) in the Security Housing Units (SHU) has recently reported that the California prison authorities and the FBI are, “now playing the old propaganda agenda by conspiring together to destroy our outside support by now personally attacking the 20 named volunteer prisoner representatives from the PBSP SHU Short Corridor.”

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and FBI are putting out character assassination propaganda to the media about the prison reps in an effort to undermine support for the hunger strikers by distracting the public away from the real issues at stake. Its the same old tired tactics used by the state when it feels threatened by any movement of the dispossessed for justice and a better life.

In any struggle against injustice those in the front lines of the struggle need the support of ordinary people across the world. Todd Ashker one of the prison hunger strike reps who is being held in solitary confinement wrote to me in a recent letter:

“I want you to know that exposing our decades of soul destroying crushing torturous conditions to the world and having people of conscience responding with positive support means a lot and is partially responsible for our own strength in heart and spirit in our struggle for real positive reform.”

Ordinary people across the world can make a stand in support of the hunger strikers protest against solitary confinement and other tortuous conditions by doing several simple things. Firstly, you can [write](#) to the prisoners on hunger strike. Besides this you can call the Department of Correction’s new ‘public hotline number’ to voice your concerns and support of the hunger strikers:916-324-3397. Pledge to the [Emergency Action Network Pledge](#) to receive alerts that help call for an end to the suffering of SHU prisoners. Sign the [petition](#) calling for Governor Brown and CDCR Secretary Jeffrey Beard to enter negotiations with the hunger strikers.

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