

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INHUMANE CONDITIONS OF CUBAN PRISONS

Below is a brief summary of the inhumane living conditions of Cuba's prisons to which the penal population is subjected, composed in part by prisoners of conscience. It is they who inform us of how they are daily victims of harassment, intimidation and deceit. They tell us about a number of different issues, including:

Medical attention:

Little primary medical care is provided, and in the majority of the cases when it is, it is accompanied by a lack of ethics and human sensibility. Medical visits are supposed to happen periodically; however, if and when they do happen, doctors arrive not knowing which medicines are available at the prison, consequently delaying the treatment of many illnesses until the next visit which may itself be delayed. In some prisons, medicines are given to prisoners without instructions, leading to dangerous self-medication. Many times the person delivering the medicine forgets or delivers it at random hours resulting to ineffective treatments, increased pain or deteriorating health conditions. A prison in Pinar del Río, for example, relies on only one doctor and one nurse for every 400 prisoners and two dentists for every 200 prisoners, not to mention terrible working conditions and scarce medicines and equipment. A prisoner may have to wait up to 12 hours in pain for a doctor's or nurse's visit. The medical quarters themselves do not even meet minimal hygienic conditions. Many of them lack water and sheets for beds. Some even lack a bathroom.

Doctors do not conduct routine inspections, nor do they assess the quality, quantity, or preparation of meals, nor their distribution. They disregard the hygienic conditions of the dormitories. Regarding specialized medical attention, there are few doctors with specializations. Those who do visit the prisons in improvised consultations do so without privacy or proper conditions to carry out their work. At times a prisoner is taken to a hospital to see a specialist, but several days go by from the time these visits are announced to when they take place. Due to inadequate coordination, the person in charge of accompanying the prisoner may not show up, the prisoner's past medical history is not presented, or the necessary exams requested by the specialist are not conducted. As expected, a great number of those taken to hospitals return without resolving their health problems. The dental service is equally deficient, though some more than others, because of problems related to electricity, water, anesthesia, fillings, sterilization of instruments, dilapidated seats or simply vacations, courses, and lack of preventative care. This poor service has frequently led many desperate prisoners tortured by pain for weeks or even months to attempt suicide or extract their own teeth with electrical pliers or string.

Although we received many cases denouncing the inhumane living conditions of prisoners, let us highlight one:

Noel Soto Long Díaz was 46 years old when he died on December 16, 2007 at the prison of Pinar del Río. During a check-up in the afternoon of December 15th, he complains to a guard about chest pain and nausea. At 10 pm, he alerts the guard that the pain had increased in intensity. The guard once again ignores him. At 3 am, as the pain becomes unbearable, he alerts another prisoner who in turn alerts the guard. Noel is then taken to the nurse who takes his pulse, gives him aspirin and sends him back to his quarters. At 5 am, he unsuccessfully attempts to lift himself and falls out of bed. Convulsions and lack of respiration set in. He is then taken to the medical quarters where his fellow prisoners attempt to resuscitate him. He dies at 6:13 am, minutes before the arrival of the medical team. The diagnosis proved his death could have been prevented. Similar cases take place almost on a daily basis in all Cuba prisons.

Provision of Food:

Both the condition of the kitchens in which prisoners' food is prepared and the food itself meet no acceptable standard. The schedule of food preparation is sporadic. Frequently there are long time lags between the food's preparation and its consumption, the food is allowed to spoil, and in some cases the food is prepared with unsafe water. It is then served to prisoners who suffer from frequent digestive problems and severe stomach infections.

The utensils with which food is served are unhygienic, as are the personnel that prepare the food. They use the prisoners' own buckets to serve milk at breakfast; these same buckets are also used for bathing, washing, and emptying latrines. The kitchen does not have washbasins or sinks with water, and the trays on which they serve food are dirty and covered with grease.

The containers for solid waste do not have lids, and this allows insects, bacteria, and all types of vectors of disease to proliferate. If the prisoners' food manages to avoid the dangers of preparation mentioned above, which is rare, the food is still prepared with no attention to taste.

Dormitories:

The fundamental characteristic of the dormitories is extreme crowdedness. There is no supply of potable water. The sewage system is in very bad condition due to blockages and the seepage of sewage water through the walls of the cells, particularly in the lower floors of the buildings. Very few have ventilation systems to extract hot air.

Censorship:

Apart from the literary censorship that is imposed upon prisoners, censorship of opinion and criticism are standard on the eve of any visit, inspection, or meeting with the commanders, the bosses of internal order, in which the prisoners are told the rules that will govern them during their stay in prison. Any prisoner that complains during the inspection can be removed from their area. Moving them once they are already established and connected to their environment can emotionally destabilize the prisoners.

Inspections:

Inspections are used as instruments of harassment and intimidation, and the authorities employ inspections in order to take from the prisoners' objects such as letters, books, reports, and pencils, and to search through all of the prisoner's effects.

Prison Personnel:

Everything indicates that prison personnel is neither chosen appropriately nor trained adequately for work in the prisons: the authorities do not take into consideration the personnel's moral integrity, their sense of humanity, or their intellectual or professional adequacy. The bad treatment and violent acts that the officials commit against the prisons are many and persistent, and widespread enough that it would be possible to make lists of both victims and victimizers. Prison personnel constantly use brute force; they generally attack in groups of 5 or 6 against one prisoner who has previously been handcuffed and immobilized. Such attacks damage both the personal dignity and the physical integrity of the prisoner. Prison personnel harass, torment, and torture, causing all types of suffering and pain to the prisoners, and they have never faced charges in front of a tribunal for their excessive, and illegal, abuses.

This environment has caused both the physical infirmities and permanent suffering of the prisoners of conscience found in Cuba's prisons today, but in addition to being victims they are also individuals, capable of denouncing all of the arbitrary acts and abuses to which they, and the rest of Cuba's prisoners, fall victim.

HEALTH CONDITIONS OF SEVERAL POLITICAL PRISONERS

Antonio Diaz Sanchez

45 years old -- held at Canaleta Prison, Ciego de Avila -- Native of Havana city

Suffering experienced while in prison:

- *Immunological ulcerous colitis*, with frequent diarrhea and deterioration of the walls of the colon, exacerbated by his diet while in prison.
- *Ischemic cardiomyopathy*.
- *Nodule on the prostate*.

Regis Iglesia Ramirez

38 years old -- Combinado del Este Prison, Havana -- Native of Havana

Suffering experienced while in prison:

- *Acute pulmonary emphysema*. The prison cells have insufficient ventilation and constant humidity, and Mr. Ramirez has gone long periods without sunlight; these conditions have deteriorated his respiratory system considerably and resulted in permanent difficulty breathing.
- *Advanced vision loss*.
- *Permanent pain* in the bones of his back and arms that makes it impossible for him to lift weight.
- *Frequent fainting spells*, of an cause. Lab tests, though guided by a doctor, are delayed for months, and this delay prevents an accurate diagnosis.
- *Chronic sinusitis with severe headaches*. His condition has not improved due to the conditions of confinement he has lived under for the past five years.

Efren Fernandez Fernandez

45 years old -- Guanajay Prison, Havana Province -- Native of Havana

Suffering experienced while in prison:

- *Arterial hypertension* resulting in considerable kidney damage and frequent kidney infections that recur due to the lack of hygiene and the scarcity of potable water and adequate medical attention.
- *Glaucoma* also resulting from arterial hypertension. Treatment of glaucoma requires specialized vision care which is not available, so the disease continues to progress.
- *Chronic erosive gastritis*. Many times the authorities do not give him complete treatment because they do not have the necessary medicines. The lack of a stable diet in the few cases he's been provided with one, and his condition of permanent stress have made it impossible for him to overcome the disease.
- *Dermatitis and herpes simplex* of the mouth and digestive system. These conditions are permanently active and result in a frequent inability to ingest the small amount of food that he receives because his entire mouth and esophagus are covered with incurable lesions. In prison he suffers from periods of little activity followed by periods of crisis. Almost a year ago the authorities announced that he would be admitted to a hospital for treatment; however, he still has not received treatment and his poor condition continues to such a degree that he has decided not to receive further medical attention, considering it insufficient and bordering on mockery .

Antonio Augusto Villareal Acosta

58 years old -- La Pendiente Prison, Santa Clara, Villa Clara -- Native of Villa Clara

Suffering experienced while in prison:

- *Nervous disease:* the inhumane conditions and the bad treatment that he faces in prison have resulted in the loss of control of his nervous system; however, he has never lost his valor or his confidence in the cause for which he fights. Prison conditions have destabilized his mental condition and he suffers from a constant state of depression. He has been given neurological medications without real treatment that would improve his quality of life; so many medications often leave him in a state of stupor and risk becoming a chronic illness from which he may never return to a life of dignity.

Blas Giraldo Reyes Rodríguez

53 years old -- Nieves Morejon Prison, Santi Espiritu -- Native of Santi Espiritu

Suffering experienced while in prison:

- *Arterial hypertension.*
- *Kidney disorders* resulting in inflamed legs, burning during urination, and losing protein through his urine.
- *Diminished hearing.*
- *Degenerative arthrosis.*
- *Chronic gastritis.*
- *High cholesterol.*
- *Operation for a hemorrhoid with intestinal papiloma virus.*
- He has received some medical treatment due to his precarious health, but stress, insufficient hygiene conditions, and poor nutrition have prevented his recovery.

Luis Enríquez Ferrer García.

32 years old -- Marverde Prison, Santiago de Cuba -- Native of Palmarito de Cauto in Santiago de Cuba

Suffering experienced while in prison:

- *Permanent gastric disorders.* Insufficient medical treatment and the permanent scarcity of potable water -- only small amounts of terrible quality -- have caused him to vomit blood and experience constant diarrhea. A gastroscopic procedure was recommended a year ago but has not been performed.
- *Environmental allergies.* These allergies have caused constant problems with him throat, which is inflamed and itchy and results in his coughing up phlegm; the allergist says that he should be removed from prison in order to resolve his allergies.
- *Three years of headaches* that remain undiagnosed after several checkups.
- As with other dispensable prisoners, there is little available medical attention for Mr. Ferrer García in the prison. What is available is very deficient and over-extended. Two years ago, they ordered for him a chest plate, but it has still not been made.

Horacio Julio Piña Borrego

41 years old -- Provincial Prison Km. 5½, Pinar del Rio -- Native of Pinar del Rio

Suffering experienced while in prison:

- *Arterial hypertension.*
- *Cervical arthrosis.*
- *Deafness in the left ear* due to a lack of medical attention after he reported pain.
- *Dial hernia.*

Alfredo Felipe Fuentes

59 years old -- Provincial Prison of Pinar del Rio -- Native of Artemisa, Havana Province

Suffering experienced while in prison:

- *Lower back lumbago with a protruding disk.*
- *Inability to keep down food, accompanied by weight loss.* The cause of his body's rejection of food is unknown.

Source: Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas, Havana, July 14th, 2008, Christian Liberation Movement