

Baroness Catherine Ashton

High Representative of the Union for Common Foreign
and Security Policy
Vice President of the European Commission (HRVP)

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS OFFICE

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Dear Baroness Ashton,

EU MUST ADDRESS USE OF PROLONGED SOLITARY CONFINEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

The United States (US) government's callous and dehumanising practice of holding prisoners in prolonged solitary confinement in the country's only federal super-maximum security (supermax) prison amounts to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and is in violation of international law. In 2011 Juan Mendez, the United Nations Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, called on all countries to ban the solitary confinement of prisoners except in very exceptional circumstances and for as short a time as possible, with an absolute prohibition in the case of juveniles and people with mental disabilities.

Amnesty International calls on the European Union (EU) and its member states to adopt an explicit common position on the use of prolonged solitary confinement in the United States.

Amnesty International's new report [Entombed: Isolation in the US Federal Prison System](#) reveals the severity of conditions that prisoners face in the United States Penitentiary, Administrative Maximum facility near Florence, Colorado (known as ADX Florence).¹ The report explores the physical and psychological impact of confining inmates to solitary cells for 22-24 hours a day. Severe conditions in ADX have led to some prisoners practicing extreme self-harm or committing suicide. Symptoms resulting from being held in isolation for extended periods include anxiety, depression, insomnia, hypertension, extreme paranoia, perceptual distortions and psychosis.

The ADX Florence federal facility has a capacity for 490 male inmates. Prisoners spend a minimum of 12 months in solitary confinement before they may become eligible for a reduction in the restrictions of their detention. In reality, many spend much longer in isolation. One study produced by lawyers found the average length of time an inmate would spend in isolation was 8.2 years.

There are now worrying signs that the US government plans to expand its use of solitary confinement in federal prisons. Plans for Thomson Correctional Center in Illinois, a new supermax prison, include provisions for solitary confinement, replicating the system at ADX.

In line with their commitments to place human rights at the centre of all external action, and in line with the EU Guidelines on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Amnesty International calls on the EU and its member states to:

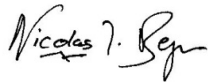
- Commit to develop a public EU policy on the use of solitary confinement, as part of EU wider work being done on trials and detention and in line with the call of the UNSR on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, to ban solitary confinement
- Make full use of the opportunity presented by the current revision of the 2012 EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy to include the objective of finalising an explicit and binding policy guiding EU and member state response and positioning on use of solitary confinement in third countries

¹ On prolonged use of solitary confinement in the USA, see also Amnesty International, "USA: End four-decade campaign of vengeance and release Albert Woodfox," 6 January 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/usa-end-four-decade-campaign-vengeance-and-release-albert-woodfox-2014-01-06> and "USA: 100 years in solitary: The 'Angola 3' and their fight for justice," 7 June 2011. http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/amr510412011en_0.pdf.

- Develop a common policy line on the use of solitary confinement within the EU in order to strengthen the credibility and legitimacy of the EU and member state position on this issue toward third countries
- Use all means available to express concern about prolonged use of solitary confinement in the US, including demarches and public statements
- Make full use of the next round of US-EU human rights consultations to raise the issue of prolonged use of solitary confinement in the US
- Urge the US government to
 - End the practice of prolonged solitary confinement at ADX and other federal facilities
 - Ensure that solitary confinement is only ever used in exceptional circumstances as a last resort and never used for prolonged or indefinite periods of time
 - Ensure that no prisoner who is under eighteen, has a mental illness or is at risk of mental illness, is ever held in solitary confinement

We welcome your engagement to address the human rights issue of prolonged use of solitary confinement, and stand ready to provide any further information you may require.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Nicolas J. Beger
Director

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