

Dear friends,

On Tuesday, May 22, a group of prisoners held in Virginia's notorious Red Onion Super-Max prison began a hunger strike to demand that the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) follow its own regulations in regard to meals, sanitation, isolation, safety and procedures for processing prisoner grievances. To support these courageous prisoners, a press conference was held today at 11 a.m. outside DOC headquarters in Richmond, sponsored by the Richmond chapter of SPARC (Supporting Prisoners and Advocating for Radical Change). (See: <http://vimeo.com/42634852>)

Below is the list of the hunger strikers' demands. As you can see, these prisoners, most of whom are African-American and virtually all of whom are poor, are not asking to be released from prison or for any special privileges. They want enough food calories to be able to survive. They want adequate medical care. They want an end to physical abuse by guards. They want to be recognized as human beings.

Red Onion is one of the most isolated prisons in the entire country, one that has come under special scrutiny over the years for its barbaric conditions. The hunger strikers are depending on those of us on the outside to help press their demands.

Please take just a moment to contact the following officials and demand (1) an immediate agreement to meet the prisoners' just demands, and (2) a pledge that there will be no retaliation of any kind against these heroic fighters for justice.

Virginia DOC Director Harold W Clarke: [804-674-3118](tel:804-674-3118)

Red Onion State Prison Chief Warden Randall Mathena: [276-796-7510](tel:276-796-7510)

Virginia Gov. Robert McDonnell: [804-786-2211](tel:804-786-2211) or email from:
www.governor.virginia.gov/AboutTheGovernor/contactGovernor.cfm

And tune in next Monday, May 28, at noon to DefendersLIVE! for a radio interview with members of Richmond SPARC, the prisoner support group that organized todays press conference. WRIR 97.3 FM or online at www.wrir.org.

For news coverage to date, see the attached files.

And for more coverage, look for the next issue of the Virginia Defender newspaper.

Thanks,

Phil Wilayto
for the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality

www.DefendersFJE.org
www.DefendersFJE.blogspot.com

10 Demands of the Red Onion State Prison Hunger Strikers

We (Prisoners at Red Onion State Prison) demand the right to an adequate standard of living while in the custody of the state!

1. We demand fully cooked food, and access to a better quality of fresh fruit and vegetables. In addition, we demand increased portions on our trays, which allows us to meet our basic nutritional needs as defined by VDOC regulations.

2. We demand that every prisoner at ROSP have unrestricted access to complaint and grievance forms and other paperwork we may request.

3. We demand better communication between prisoners and higher- ranking guards. Presently higher-ranking guards invariably take the lower-ranking guards' side in disputes between guards and prisoners, forcing the prisoner to act out in order to be heard. We demand that higher- ranking guards take prisoner complaints and grievances into consideration without prejudice.

4. We demand an end to torture in the form of indefinite segregation through the implementation of a fair and transparent process whereby prisoners can earn the right to be released from segregation. We demand that prison officials completely adhere to the security point system, insuring that prisoners are transferred to institutions that correspond with their particular security level.

5. We demand the right to an adequate standard of living, including access to quality materials that we may use to clean our own cells. Presently, we are forced to clean our entire cell, including the inside of our toilets, with a single sponge and our bare hands. This is unsanitary and promotes the spread of disease-carrying bacteria.

6. We demand the right to have 3rd party neutral observers visit and document the condition of the prisons to ensure an end to the corruption amongst prison officials and widespread human rights abuses of prisoners. Internal Affairs and Prison Administrator's monitoring of prison conditions have not alleviated the dangerous circumstances we are living under while in custody of the state which include, but are not limited to: the threat of undue physical aggression by guards, sexual abuse and retaliatory measures, which violate prison policies and our human rights.

7. We demand to be informed of any and all changes to VDOC/IOP policies as soon as these changes are made.

8. We demand the right to adequate medical care. Our right to medical care is guaranteed under the eight amendment of the constitution, and thus the deliberate indifference of prison officials to our medical needs constitutes a violation of our constitutional rights. In particular, the toothpaste we are forced to purchase in the prison is a danger to our dental health and causes widespread gum disease and associated illnesses.

9. We demand our right as enumerated through VDOC policy, to a monthly haircut. Presently, we have been denied haircuts for nearly three months. We also demand to have our razors changed out on a weekly basis. The current practice of changing out the razors every three weeks leaves prisoners exposed to the risk of dangerous infections and injury.

10. We demand that there be no reprisals for any of the participants in the Hunger Strike. We are simply organizing in the interest of more humane living conditions.

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