



## AN ISSUES CHAPTER OF SOCIAL WELFARE ACTION ALLIANCE (SWAA)

Between 80,000 and 100,000 prisoners are detained in solitary confinement in U.S. jails and prisons every day -- some for months, some for years, and some even for decades – most for non-violent infractions. They live inside cramped, concrete, windowless cells for 22 to 24 hours a day, Normal human contact, telephone calls, and exercise are severely restricted. In many of these units, lights are never turned off. Solitary has often been described as being buried alive. Those in solitary are at heightened risk of suicide and self-harm.

Solitary confinement is a torturous, cruel, and inhumane practice that violates United Nations Conventions and Covenants (U.N. General Assembly, 1966, 1984). Still, it continues in the United States and in many other countries (CCR/LSPC/CPF, 2014). Juan Mendéz, the former U.N. Rapporteur on Torture, has called for its prohibition (Mendéz , 2014; U.N. Human Rights, 2011). Himself a survivor of torture, Mendéz stresses that prolonged use (over 15 days) is torture and is damaging to all who endure it.

**In the United States, social workers provide services in those very prisons and jails that keep prisoners in solitary confinement units, creating a dual loyalty dilemma: acting as gatekeepers - deciding which prisoners are severely mentally ill and should be removed from their cells to get treatment and which ones can handle the severe stresses of solitary confinement. This violates our profession's Code of Ethics - to help people in need, to challenge social problems and injustice, and to respect the dignity and worth of every individual.**

Social Workers Against Solitary Confinement (SWASC) is a national group of social workers and others, dedicated to confronting the issue of solitary confinement, both on a macro-level as a core mechanism of our racist and classist system of mass incarceration, and on a micro-level as a practice that social workers in correctional settings actively and passively participate in, while being simultaneously charged with upholding the human right and dignity of all people.

We seek to provide a safe platform from which to explore ethical and practical dilemmas, and work with our social work institutions to find ways to promote humane alternatives to solitary confinement.

We urge social workers, students and members of allied profession, formerly incarcerated people and others to join us. You can learn more about our goals, efforts and accomplishments, and volunteer at [www.SocialWorkersasc.org](http://www.SocialWorkersasc.org) and/or email us.

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