

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: AMR 51/047/2013

11 July 2013

Amnesty International calls for the release of Herman Wallace from prison

Amnesty International is appealing on humanitarian grounds for the release from prison of Herman Wallace, of the 'Angola 3', who has spent over 40 years incarcerated in cruel conditions of solitary confinement and is now terminally ill with cancer.

"Herman Wallace is 71 years old and has advanced liver cancer. After decades of cruel conditions and a conviction that continues to be challenged by the courts, he should be released immediately to his family so that he can be cared for humanely during his last months" said Amnesty International spokesperson, Tessa Murphy.

Wallace was diagnosed with cancer after being taken to hospital on 14 June. He has for some time been on medication for what was diagnosed as a stomach fungus, and over the last months has lost considerable weight. He is now being held in isolation in the infirmary in Hunt Correctional Centre.

Wallace and fellow prisoner Albert Woodfox were placed in isolation in 1972; since then they have been confined for 23 hours a day to cells measuring 2 by 3 metres. They are allowed access to outdoor exercise for only 3 hours a week, which is taken alone in a cage. Deprived of any meaningful social interaction, they have had no access to work, educational, social or rehabilitation programmes; communication with family and friends is restricted to occasional visits and limited telephone calls.

The two men are believed to have spent longer in solitary confinement than virtually any other US prisoner in recent times. During this time, the prison authorities have broken their own policies to justify their continued incarceration in harsh and inhumane conditions.

Before Wallace's cancer diagnosis, the conditions had already had an impact on both the men's physical and psychological health as acknowledged by a federal judge in 2007. The severe toll of solitary confinement on inmates' mental and physical health has been extensively documented in studies, including harmful effects after just 15 days of isolated confinement. In recognition of this damage, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Mendez, has called on states to prohibit the practice in excess of 15 days.

Both men were convicted of the murder of a prison guard in 1973 yet no physical evidence links them to the crime; potentially exculpatory DNA evidence has been lost, and the testimony of the main eyewitness has been discredited. Citing racial discrimination, misconduct by the prosecution and inadequate defence, state and federal judges have overturned Woodfox's conviction three times, while Wallace's case is once again on review before the federal courts. These serious legal concerns compound the injustice of confining the men for decades in such punitive and cruel conditions.

Amnesty International is also extremely concerned about the worsening conditions of confinement for Albert Woodfox in David Wade Correctional Centre. For approximately two months, Woodfox has been subjected to additional punitive measures, including strip searches each time he leaves or enters his cell, being escorted in ankle and wrist restraints, restricted phone access, and non-contact visits through a perforated metal screen. Temperatures in the prison cells are reportedly extremely high, regularly reaching up to 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Even with fans—which simply blow the hot air around the cells – such conditions can pose a

serious health risk to inmates who are confined to their cells for up to 23 hours a day. These risks are even greater in the case of the elderly or infirm, who are more vulnerable to higher temperatures because their bodies are unable to adjust to the heat as quickly as those of healthy adults.

Amnesty International urges Louisiana authorities to take immediate steps to alleviate these dangerous conditions for all prisoners and calls on them once again to remove Albert Woodfox from isolation.