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PUBLIC STATEMENT

USA (Michigan)

Amnesty International calls for inquiry into reports of retaliation by prison staff against women inmates who complain of abuse

Amnesty International is very concerned by reports that staff in the Michigan Department of Corrections have threatened and committed acts of retaliation against inmates and fellow correctional staff who have complained about sexual and other abuses of inmates at Scott Correctional Facility, the Huron Valley Center, the Crane Facility and at Camp Branch.

The organization is calling on the authorities to make it clear that inmates have a right to complain about ill-treatment by correctional officers without fear of retaliation; that staff have a duty to report ill-treatment; and that disciplinary action will be taken against any member of staff threatening or retaliating against an inmate or colleague who has reported staff misconduct.

The reported acts of retaliation against prisoners include:

- complainants in a lawsuit against the Department of Corrections being sexually and physically assaulted by guards and being prevented from receiving legal mail which has been confiscated as contraband
- women being subjected to unnecessarily intrusive body searches
- inmates being verbally harassed and threatened with physical or sexual abuse
- inmates being falsely cited for misconduct (including for 'falsely' reporting sexual misconduct)
- women who have made misconduct complaints being targeted for disciplinary action
- women who report misconduct being placed in segregation status.

Amnesty International has also received reports suggesting that the current procedure for dealing with complaints of retaliation is inadequate, in particular because there is no independent body responsible for investigating such allegations.

During a recent research visit to Michigan Amnesty International received reports on this issue from inmates, staff and attorneys representing inmates.

Other incidents of this kind are reported in the Human Rights Watch report "Nowhere to

Hide: Retaliation Against Women in Michigan State Prisons" (September 1998).

Amnesty International has written to the director of the Department of Corrections urging him to establish an independent inquiry into the allegations of retaliation and the procedure for dealing with complaints of this nature.

ENDS.../