

**Families Dare To Speak, Dare to Resist**

## **IF YOU WILL NOT STAND UP FOR YOUR OWN HUMANITY...WHO WILL?**

**By: Richard G. Hall, Jr.**

In February 2011, millions of oppressed people in the Middle East received a simultaneous "CALLING" ... The sign ignited them in the streets and on the blazing hot sands of the North African Nation of Tunisia... to "STAND UP AND DEMAND THEIR RIGHTS AS HUMAN BEINGS!"...They answered the call. In just a few weeks they liberated themselves from under the iron feet of tyranny and injustice. They had no wealthy backers. They had no military weaponry. They had real conviction and were hell bent in soul to tolerate such evil not another day! The people of Egypt were "CALLED FROM WITHIN NEXT"...They too took to the streets to bring down oppression and injustice as well. In just a few weeks, what had been taking place for decades was crushed like a castle of sand struck by a powerful wave! Now certain Libyans are STANDING UP! They are STANDING UP IN YEMEN...IRAQ...SYRIA...IT IS SAID THAT MANY ARE CALLED, BUT FEW ARE CHOSEN. RIGHT NOW, YOU MUST CHOOSE TO STAND UP.

Unfortunately, across the Atlantic Ocean here in the UnUnited States of America the oppressed are merely watching millions of people elsewhere do what they should have done a very long time ago. As it stands since the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 it seems as if standing up for what is only humanly right has, for the most part, vanished like Houdini. Is this so? Nonetheless, all is never lost or as bleak as it may seem in of all places, a cold old prison in the middle of California, I personally encountered a real living soul who had received his CALLING...Charles Steward is his name...aka Charlie. As it stands, among his many talents I have since learned that Charlie has a gift for writing stage plays. Such as the sort you find featured down the length of New York's Broadway. He's in the early stages of developing his talent. Nonetheless he is at least participating. What was most interesting is that Charlie has been called upon to write a play shining a theme about "PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES PUTTING ASIDE THEIR DIFERRENCES AND COMING TOGETHER AS ONE POWERFUL UNITED FORCE".

A week or so after Charlie shared his CALLING with me I received a letter under my cell door. It was from over 2,000 miles away. It was from the Philadelphia Chapter of "The Human Rights Coalition" (HRC), Patricia Vickers. I was stunned when Ms. Vickers asked that I consider writing a piece for the upcoming issue of "THE MOVEMENT", the official publication of HRC. Especially when I read that the theme was to deal with "PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES COMING TOGETHER TO STAND UP AGAINST THE INJUSTICE THAT MASS INCARCERATION CONTINUES TO REEK UPON SO MANY." Ms. Vickers had no knowledge of Charlie's CALLING per se. Nonetheless she had been called, too. And in turn she has given the CALL to me.

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**THE MOVEMENT**

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SUMMER 2011 (ISSUE # 11)

This is by no means an easy subject to touch upon. Simply because the families of - especially - those who perpetually fill Americas severely overcrowded jails and prisons, who are chained to parole and probation supervision, or wasting away in the Juvenile Detention Facilities and camps out in the boondocks are generally perpetually poor. They lack economic means to protect their loved ones from the often roughshod injustices inflicted by the notoriously corrupt racist, as well, as classist CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM. A system which has been conducting a full scale war against especially perpetually poor families of color and their communities for the past 40 years. This out right siege has been met with little real resistance.

I have been incarcerated since October 29, 1977. I was 19 years old back then. God willing, I'll turn 53 years this year. If you want to get a feel for how long people like me have been alienated from the outside world in which you are hopefully living in opposed to merely existing. Try to reflect upon all the things you have done and experienced in the past thirty-four years up to right now. While all that was going on out there, that's how long I've been in here. If you have a family member in my location who has been sentenced to serve a certain amount of time visualize the fate they face. Without question, I, like prisoners for the most part did something initially to end up in prison. Still, that does by no means justify what your loved ones bear witness to in such houses of death and despair. There is much the public does not know. Simply because not nearly enough people are standing up and at least speaking out which is always the first course of affirmative action if you ever expect your situation to improve. It doesn't matter what side of any prison's barbed wire fence you're standing, you have to stand up!

In 1980 I observed a woman with child inside her who used to visit her husband faithfully while he was housed at San Quentin State Prison. She had a bouncing baby boy, the apple of her eye. Try to imagine how I felt in 1999 when I reported to my prison work assignment and learned that that woman's baby boy had grown up from wearing diapers to end up with me and his father in prison? How many baby boys in your family have grown up from diapers to end up locked up like an animal behind prison bars? What about the baby girls? How many of them do you know? Always remember one very important thing about prisoners in general. They usually embrace the same exact mentality of the communities they come from. They are also a reflection of, too often, the worst about their own family. I have lost count of how many youngsters I have encountered in here who were not even born when I entered this bottomless pit. Even worse, so many will never leave, and some even have more time to serve than me. That is TERRIFYING. And it hurts. Do you have any family members that fit such a profile?

I will assure you that if you conduct a survey of all your own children or the children in you communities all around you asking them what they want to be when they grow up, trust me, not one will tell you a criminal or prison inmate. The cold reality is, too many of them will take that route. The question is, whose child is going to fall by the wayside? There are untold numbers of fathers and sons, sisters and brothers, even mothers in here. Do you have family members in prison? There are also a whole lot of grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews, daughters, even cousins in here. Nine times out of ten each one of them have numerous family members out there in the world. Mentally multiply all the family members behind bars times all the family members they have out on the streets. That is one massive army...that's sheer power!

What I regret most, now, even more than what I did to end up here is what I did not do or didn't try to do when I had the chance! I pray you will not reap this regret to burn with inside. Things aren't getting any better out there or in here for that matter. Regardless, if we put aside our ignorance and indifference and pride and start working together like real family, we too will choose to ACCEPT OUR CALLING, TOGETHER AS ONE POWERFUL FORCE TO IMPROVE OUR SITUATIONS ALL AROUND THE BOARD. You have to decide for yourself.