

Conscious Prisoner ~ The Evolution of Uhuru

On Total Lockdown

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On the 18th of July, 2016, at around 7pm, a physical altercation occurred among a group of prisoners outside on the recreation yard.

Whenever there is a group fight, those of us who are not involved experience what is commonly known as "group punishment", which is designed to instill within prisoners not involved in the altercation-but who must still suffer the same punishment- feelings of hostility and animosity towards those prisoners involved in the confrontation and thus the cause of group punishment.

This reliance on group punishment as a so-called "management" tool resulted in the entire prison being placed on total lockdown on the morning of July 19, 2016. This means we are confined to our cells 24 hours a day, except on those occasions when we are allowed to exit to make a fifteen minute phone call or take a five minute shower.

This cell- which I share with an older white inmate- is approximately ten steps (heel-to-toe) in length from the cell door to my bunk (the bunk is situated parallel with the back wall so that it shortens the length of the cell), and five steps wide; no bigger (an in some cases, much smaller) than the average sized bathroom in your home. This cell is too small for one human being to occupy, let alone two.

There is one sink and toilet made from a ceramic-type of material, one plastic chair, two lights, two plastic movable lockers under my bed, and two tiny metal lockers bolted to the floor and walls, a pillow and a thin mattress that feels like a slab of concrete. The toilet is electronically preprogrammed with only four flushes, per use, per 30 minute cycle, so that if we exhaust the four flushes while defecating, we must endure the smell of feces and urine for 30 minutes until the toilet automatically resets.

The antiquated ventilation system- which is ineffective in removing the smell of urine, feces and flatulence from the cell- renders the air stale, stagnant, and repulsive. Oftentimes I find myself standing at the cell door with my nose sticking out of the small slot in an effort to breathe what passes for "fresh air" out in the day room. After standing for a period of time, my knees, ankles and feet begins to swell and hurt.

With the lack of air conditioning, the temperature inside these cells regularly surpasses 100 degrees during the summer months. Sometimes it gets so hot that the concrete walls begins to "sweat" from the humidity and condensation. My tiny 5 inch Massey fan, which sells for a staggering \$30 in the prison commissary, and the tiny window in the back of the cell, which rarely allows outside air to enter through, provides little relief from the sweltering heat. In the middle of the night when I am roused from my sleep, I'll find that my underwear, socks, pillowcase and bedsheets have become drenched in my sweat. New or clean sheets and pillowcases aren't provided the first few days of lockdown.

Sanitation and other cleaning materials are not provided on lockdown. So I will often use my own personal soap and washcloth to clean the sink and toilet. As no plastic gloves and toilet brush are allowed, I must use my bare hands in a toilet which had been exposed to the feces of thousands of other prisoners just to clean it to provide a semblance of cleanness.

As I mentioned earlier, we are allowed to exit our cell to take a 5 to 10 minute shower, but only once every three days. In these hot and humid conditions, going 24 hours without a shower results in one emitting extreme body odor. By the third, my skin has become sticky, irritated and prickly and my scalp develops tiny sores that itches nonstop. Soon I arrive at the point where I am unable to bear the smell of my own body odor.

Our breakfast, lunch and dinner trays are hand-delivered to our cell door by non-security administrative staffers accompanied by a corrections officer. The cell door opens, we are handed our tray, then the cell door is slammed shut by the officer who is frustrated with having to perform extra- often tedious- work.

Most of the time the food under-prepared and arrives cold because it has been sitting, unattended, in the cafeteria for a hour before it is picked up and brought to the housing units to be passed out. The trays themselves are usually dirty because they have been rushed through the tray machine to have them ready for the next feeding cycle.

In order to cope and pass time on lockdown, I will usually read to keep my mind sharp as a sword and write essays such as this one while listening to conscious Hip Hop; or I'll exercise for a few minutes to stay fit and agile. Other times, I'll just sit on the side of my bunk and watch the ants crawl to and fro in desperate search for food.

These are the kinds of hellish and dehumanizing prison conditions (all of which violate the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners) I was sentenced- at barely 18-years-old- to endure for the rest of my natural life; but, I remain unbroken and undeterred as a politicized prisoner whose only tasks are the liberation of my mind & body and all oppressed peoples from the death grip of global oppression, exploitation and genocide and the creation of a society that INCLUSIVE OF ALL regardless of race, color, creed, sexuality or country of origin.

FREEDOM IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE!