

The following resolution was approved by the delegates at a plenary of the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ, held in Indianapolis June 30-July 4, 2023.

**A RESOLUTION CONDEMNING PROLONGED SOLITARY CONFINEMENT
AS A FORM OF TORTURE**

A Resolution of Witness

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS the Twelfth General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted a “Pronouncement on Human Rights” that denounced torture of any kind and affirmed that the “relationship of God to creation gives all human beings their in-alienable human right.” And further stated that “rights must be not only declared and codified, but also must be cared for, nurtured and embodied in covenant relationships between persons, groups, nations and between human beings and nature”¹, and

WHEREAS solitary confinement is defined by the United Nations in its Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, as revised in 2015, also known as “The Nelson Mandela Rules,” as the confinement of prisoners for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact, in excess of 15 days)², and

WHEREAS long-term isolation has been shown to offer no rehabilitative benefit, but its destructive psychological effects are well-documented,³ amounting to torture under international law⁴, and

WHEREAS solitary confinement as a form of torture violates the U.N. Convention Against Torture,⁵ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,⁶ and the U.N. International Convention on Civil and Political Rights⁷, and

WHEREAS the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ called for the dismantling of discriminatory systems of mass incarceration in the United States, a system that has resulted in the proliferation of prolonged solitary confinement nationwide, making the U.S. a global outlier in its use of incarceration and the systematic torture of prolonged solitary confinement⁸, and

WHEREAS the carceral system in the U.S. is built on racism⁹ and cannot be reformed, we seek ways to reduce harm to those currently incarcerated as we work toward alternatives to incarceration.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ recognizes prolonged solitary confinement, as defined by “The Nelson Mandela Rules,” as a form of torture.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ recognizes the potential for abuse in all forms of solitary confinement for any duration of time and condemns its use.

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ condemns the use of prolonged solitary confinement by the United States and any government in the world, including national, state, local, and military jurisdictions, immigration detention centers, and private prisons and calls on our government to explore and implement alternatives to isolated confinement.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls on all members of the United Church of Christ to demand that their government ends any use of prolonged solitary confinement in prisons, jails, and detention centers, whether publicly run or contracted with private companies.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that as Christians we are called to amplify the voices of the oppressed, including the voices and leadership of the formerly incarcerated who return to society with an intimate knowledge of prison policies and offer first-hand knowledge of the harm caused by prolonged solitary confinement.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls all settings to work with other faiths and human rights groups, including the National Religious Campaign Against Torture¹⁰, among others, to condemn the torture of prolonged solitary confinement, work toward its abolition in the United States and around the world, and support humane and restorative alternatives.

FUNDING: The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION: The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

¹ <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/THE%20%20PFOUNDMENT-ON-HUMAN-RIGHTS-GS12.pdf>

² <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/443/41/PDF/N1544341.pdf?OpenElement>

³ https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1362&context=law_journal_law_policy

⁴ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/443/41/PDF/N1544341.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/443/41/PDF/N1544341.pdf?OpenElement>

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-elimination-all-forms-racial>

⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

⁸ <https://new.uccfiles.com/pdf/GS30-DISMANTLING-DISCRIMINATORY-SYSTEMS-OF-MASS-INCARCERATION.pdf>

⁹ https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/10/07-14-2022_CERD-Shadow-Report-Draft_with_endnotes.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.nrcat.org/>