

US Fails Human Rights Inspection

By Queen Jennifer Gann

It's December 10, 2012, International Human Rights Day. As I sit in my cold, bleak circumstances here at Kern Valley State Prison in Delano, California, I contemplate the egregious human rights violations that I have witnessed in the past 23 years of my incarceration.

When I first went to jail and came to prison, in my naïveté, I attempted to use the inmate grievance procedures to challenge instances of staff misconduct and oppressive prison conditions. This resulted in my being physically assaulted and brutalized by both Orange County Sheriff's deputies and prison guards.

Subsequently, as I became somewhat of a prisoner activist and Jailhouse Lawyer, I

Continued attempting to exercise and enforce my legal rights, as well as those of other prisoners. I filed hundreds of inmate appeals over the past couple of decades, participated in prison protests & hunger strikes, pursued multiple lawsuits, and even engaged in direct actions of Prisoner Resistance and self-defense ("crimes" for which I was given a life sentence under the California "Three Strikes" law!)

Some inmate appeals were successful, most were not. Of the dozen or so lawsuits, I had one victory resulting in my release from Pelican Bay - Security Housing Unit (SHU) after nearly 10 years in solitary confinement. I also obtained two separate monetary settlements for acts of guard brutality. The rest, as with most prison litigation, resulted

in summary dismissals.

The U.S. government and corporate media likes to focus on international human rights issues or abuses in other countries, such as China or Iran, but what about right here in Amerika? What about the use of deadly force against unarmed civilians and prisoners by law enforcement officers? What about Oscar Grant and Leonard Peltier? What about widespread sexual abuse in U.S. detention facilities, and contemptuous disregard for the rights or safety of transgender prisoners??

There have been, and continues to be, more failures than victories for human rights in the U.S. criminal justice system. Even with the passage of laws like the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 (PREA), and the signing of various

international treaties, the problems remain of non-compliance, lack of accountability, and public apathy.

So... what is to be done?

How can we raise public awareness? How can we ensure that human rights are respected and protected here in the U.S.? Will you take action?!?

I, for one, will continue blogging about my experiences as a trans-woman prisoner. I welcome you to join the public debate concerning human rights in the U.S., post your comments and I will be happy to respond. I also welcome personal pen-pal correspondence at:

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Thank you! 😊