

The following is a report by Charles Carney of the 8th Day Center for Justice on the activation of the Emergency Response Network in regards to Ayice Lasana's 18 day hunger strike at the Wabash Valley Prison -- SHU in Carlisle, Indiana. Ayice began the strike on June 12. The Emergency Response Network was activated around the following 3 demands outlined by Ayice:

1. He personally wanted to be transferred up to the northern part of the state where the prison staff was more racially integrated and he didn't have to put up as much with racist guards. He also wanted to be closer to his family,
2. He wanted to see the isolative nature of the imprisonment changed and said that he was seeing too many guys around him going insane.
3. He wanted to see more racial balance in both the guard and prisoner population at SHU -- more Black guards and less Black prisoners. (Since that time a printout of prisoners at the SHU shows that of the 110 imprisoned there, 65 are Black and 45 are white).

Ayice asked us to call Ed Cohn, Superintendent of the Indiana DOC and Craig Hanks, warden of Wabash Valley in regards to these three demands.

On June 29th, Charles Carney called both of the above. Ed Cohn's office referred him to Pam Pattison, spokesperson for the Indiana Department of Corrections. She confirmed that Ayice (whom she referred to as Chris Lee) was still on a hunger strike which he began June 12. Charles expressed Ayice's desire to be transferred and the reality of a highly disproportionate number of white prison staff and highly disproportionate number of black prisoners. Her response was that this area of Indiana was predominantly white, therefore it was hard to hire large numbers of blacks.

The next day Ron Batchelor from Wabash Valley Prison called Charles and let him know that Ayice (Chris Lee) had finished his fast in exchange for a request for transfer. He stated that if prisoners wanted to be transferred there was no need to undergo a hunger strike and that Charles only needed to call him in the future to discuss these things. Charles told him that the reason for his fast transcended a mere request for transfer and brought up the racial issues. Charles also told him that a group of concerned Indiana citizens (Northwest Indiana Coalition to Stop Control Units) would be visiting on the 21st of July and they would address these issues in more detail.

Within the next few days at least 10 other people called the Prison and the Director of the D.O.C. Most reported similar experiences. By the time most people called, Ayice had already ended his hunger fast, and this may have detracted from their leverage. However, the Prison officials did not begin to negotiate with Ayice until after our calls began coming in. We can at least claim a minor victory in that fact.

Also, Human Rights Watch visited the prison a week after we made our calls, and the

Northwest Indiana Coalition to Stop Control Units visited two weeks after. Ayice's demands laid the groundwork for the concerns these two groups intended to address. The Indiana Coalition to Stop Control Unit Prisons delegation also made a commitment to visit with Ayice when they were there, and he was probably able to fill them in on further concerns.

Overall, it seems these calls were helpful and let the prison and the Indiana Department of Corrections know that we have an organized entity out here, and they can no longer get away with anything they want. Thanks.

ABOUT 10 PEOPLE LET US KNOW THAT THEY MADE THE CALLS EITHER BY PHONE OR EMAIL. ALTHOUGH OTHERS MAY HAVE DONE SO AS WELL, WE HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING. IF WE ARE GOING TO BE EFFECTIVE, YOU NEED TO BOTH MAKE THE CALLS AND LET THE ERN NETWORK KNOW THAT YOU MADE THE CALLS. ONLY THEN CAN WE DEVELOP SOMETHING THAT ACTUALLY WORKS.

* put this in the very beginning