

# Human rights group rips Marion prison

By Tom Gibbons

The Marion (Ill.) Federal Penitentiary, where convicts have been "locked down" for more than 3½ years, routinely deprives prisoners of their human rights in violation of United Nations minimum standards, an Amnesty International report charges.

The study, obtained by the Chicago Sun-Times, was sent to Attor-

## 'Cruel, degrading' treatment charged

ney General Edwin Meese III last December, but two months ago federal prison officials wrote Amnesty to say that the United States is "committed to providing safe and humane facilities" to criminal offenders and that no cruel and unusual conditions exist at Marion.

The London-based human rights group charges in its 15-page report that the maximum-security prison commonly violates inmates' rights, noting shackling of prisoners to their beds and failure to establish work programs for most inmates, who are forced to sit in their cells

for up to 22 hours a day.

"Certain conditions could, in their totality, amount to 'cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment,'" said Amnesty International, which in recent memory has never issued such a critical report about an American prison. Such findings, however, have routinely been lodged against prison conditions in many Third World nations.

The study charged that Marion, which is located in the southern tip of Illinois and has come to be known as the "New Alcatraz," routinely violates the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

Marion, the study warned, may also violate the UN's declaration against torture and other forms of cruel and inhuman punishment.

Amnesty urged the government to conduct an "independent assessment" of prison conditions in the entire nation, particularly of the lockdown conditions in place at Marion since October, 1983.

George Wilson, Marion's executive assistant, said "we believe conditions at Marion have been thoroughly reviewed" and found to be fit.

Wilson pointed to a federal court ruling last February in which the judge upheld the constitutionality of Marion's lockdown, the longest in U.S. history.

The lockdown was imposed after two guards and a convict were fatally stabbed within a five-day period.

Marion houses some 350 prisoners considered to be the most assaultive and disruptive and the most likely to attempt to escape in the federal prison system of some 50 institutions.

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