

GREETINGS FROM ALEJANDRINA TORRES, SUSAN ROSENBERG, AND SILVIA BARALDINI

We send our revolutionary greetings to the Women's Poetry Reading. We send our fighting spirits and our love of the struggle.

We want to give witness about what we have gone through in the Lexington Control Unit, also known as the High Security Unit (HSU), what the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) has subjected us to, how it has failed, what the current conditions mean, and what lies ahead. Many people have asked us to explain what our lives are like. Many people have asked us how, on the one hand, we can be okay and, on the other, describe our existence as psychological torture. They ask how can both be true at the same time. The content of our lives is determined by our commitment to the struggle. First and foremost we are revolutionaries. Our view of the world, our ideology, our dedication to national liberation and socialism cannot be "disappeared" from our hearts and minds. We have endured the conditions, struggle to overcome the limitations imposed because we have been united by our joint resolve to defeat the political objectives of the Justice Department/BOP behind the creation of HSU. Not a day goes by without reaffirming our unity in practice. The knowledge that people are in struggle all over the world as well as right here cannot be removed from our lives no matter how strict the isolation imposed by the state.

But it is also true that we are human beings. And the conditions of isolation; sensory deprivation; constant surveillance; censorship of all communications; the almost complete lack of meaningful intellectual interaction with comrades, friends, and family; the lack of any physical activity except for walking; the unhealthy diet; and the sleep deprivation that went on for 3 months and still occasionally occurs all take a devastating toll. The effects of long-term isolation have been well-documented. We are suffering some of the symptoms. We all hallucinate spots, shadows, and lights, and our vision is deteriorating. It is difficult to adjust our vision to natural light. We experience extreme levels of frustration from the internalization of rage. We have experienced changes in metabolic functioning: dizziness due to low blood pressure or heart palpitations due to high blood pressure. All of us, to a greater or lesser degree, have experienced a loss of memory and mental concentration and a constant tiredness that has no relationship to physical exertion. We all have a tendency to use smaller and smaller space. We can recognize in ourselves some mental and physical deterioration.

The extreme conditions of control and manipulation are designed to destroy us first politically and spiritually and then physically. They are compounded by the constant harassment of the guards and administration. This harassment has heightened since the announcement that the BOP intended to close HSU in 9-11 months. Guards have revealed their ideological commitment to the existence of the HSU. There is a correlation between their perception of a victory for us and the intensity of the harassment. One graphic illustration --the Catholic nun called us "little shits" when it became clear that we were aware of the meetings between the ACLU and the BOP and had not shared that knowledge with her.

Part of the "mission" of the BOP with the establishment of this unit is to neutralize our commitments, our political identities, to render us psychologically dependent. The experiences at the HSU have not done that; rather, our overall commitment has strengthened. We believe that the psychological experimentation conducted on us to break us, to destroy our unity, to try to make us hate ourselves, to feel abandoned by our movements--all of it has failed. This was a very important factor in the recent BOP announcement that they are "phasing out the HSU."

At the same time they will build a new more secure prison for women or upgrade a unit within an existing male facility. Are we to look forward to a Marion for women? They have rejected, out of hand, our right to be in general population and promised to make conditions more "liveable." There is no way to end our isolation in the present circumstances. The only just resolution to our conditions is our immediate transfer to general population in a regular women's prison, not a detention center or anywhere else.

The BOP has admitted to receiving no threats of external assault. This important admission eliminates the public criterion used for our placement here. Why were the three of us really put here? The question is partially answered by another interesting comment made by the general counsel of the BOP. We were placed here because the "Justice Community" demanded it. In other words, the JTTF [the FBI's Joint Terrorist Task Force] has the power to determine what happens to political prisoners and prisoners of war after our conviction in the courts.

The phasing out of the HSU is a partial victory. It is a victory because small group isolation of women political prisoners has been temporarily halted. It is a victory because no other women prisoners will be brought to this basement. It is a victory because the experiment failed. It is a victory because the BOP failed to stop all the efforts of struggle with their tactics of hysteria, redbaiting, and criminalization aimed at us and the movements we are part of. It is a victory because thousands of additional people are aware of the human rights struggle going on inside the united states. It is a setback for their anti-terrorism campaign that is based on lies and fear. The government believed that by calling us terrorists, by labelling us the most dangerous women in federal prison, they could psychologically torture us and that the people would allow it. This defeat is our collective victory.

But it is partial because the BOP has not backed down from their basic definition/classifications of any of the political prisoners and prisoners of war. The BOP is engaged in a public relations campaign and cover-up to hide what has gone on here. For example, they have publicly denied that the ACLU report influenced them. Why is a cover-up necessary? Because trading a building for a basement does not insure an end to human rights violations. Because to admit they have done this to us would be to expose their internal program to combat revolutionaries and progressive dissent under the guise of fighting terrorism.

For the last 15 years the BOP/Justice Department has been trying to institutionalize a psychologically-based control unit for women POWs and political prisoners. The behavior modification units in the 70's that housed

Assata Shakur, Rita Brown, Marilyn Buck, and others, followed by the Cardinal Unit which was a more refined experiment in isolation that held Puerto Rican POWs Haydee Torres and Lucy Rodriguez, and now, the HSU. With each attempt there has been political and legal opposition, and the BOP has withdrawn only to come back each time with a more sophisticated plan. Is this what is in store for all the women who are being reclassified?

We thank all those who have supported us and have fought against Marion and HSU. In particular, we want to acknowledge the leadership role of the Puerto Rican Independence Movement who has fought valiantly to expose the conditions of the prisoners and all political prisoners. Our resistance was reinforced by this work and by the untiring efforts of all of our attorneys.

We believe that to fight for and win the demand of immediate closure of this unit and of the transfer of all women here will make it much harder for the BOP to build another Marion for women. The more massive the exposure of the program here, the more widespread the awareness will help to ensure rejection of institutionalizing psychological torture and the use of control units. Now is the moment to launch a national offensive against the BOP/ Justice Department.

Life is all struggle--struggle is all life.
Victory to National Liberation and movements for social justice and liberation.

Venceremos.

Alejandrina Torres

Puerto Rican prisoner of war

Susan Rosenberg

North American, anti-imperialist political prisoner

Silvia Baraldini

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