January 23, 2017

Sally Q. Yates

Acting Attorney General

U.S. Department of Justice 950

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Michael E. Horowitz

Inspector General

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Thomas R. Kane, Ph.D.

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Dear Acting Attorney General Sally Q. Yates, Inspector General Michael E. Horowitz, Acting Director of the Bureau of Prisons Thomas R. Kane, Ph.D., and esteemed others:

            My name is Martin Gottesfeld, and I am an imprisoned [human rights activist](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/martin-gottesfeld-hunger-strike_us_57e598f5e4b08d73b83166e5) and journalist writing to you from solitary confinement at the Metropolitan Correctional Center—New York, in Manhattan. Outlined in the letter below are some key justifications that current oversight procedures both MCC New York and MDC Brooklyn are insufficient and necessitate full audits of all Bureau of Prisons facilities in this area by all relevant bodies.

            I’m contacting you because there are some important issues at this facility that require your collective attention. The more severe are threats to health. There are both rodent and insect infestations. Roaches are found in the food, and I have personally observed insect eggs as well.

            Additionally, the building is insufficiently protected from the climate. The heat is mostly non-functional in the winter, and even when it does work somewhat, it’s spotty. Some cells may hit the 50-degree range while others are much colder. I have been told to expect sweltering heat in the summer as well. I have also been informed that the warden has the heat turned way up specifically on inspection days, and then returned to its previous insufficient levels when accreditors and inspectors leave.

            There are also water leaks all over at least the 9th and 10th floors, with visible signs of rust and corrosion. Not only does this potentially impact the structural stability of the building, but the pools of standing water that results are a breeding ground for infections. Incredibly, I have also observed amused officers turn off an inmate’s toilet as an ad-hoc disciplinary measure.

            The above combined with apathetic medical and mental health departments pose grave risks to the well-being of the inmate population, and as a proud American, I am shocked by the existence of such deplorable conditions at our federal facilities. After all, we often judge other nations harshly for far less inhumane and degrading circumstances.

            To illustrate further, there are two specific cases I would like to highlight as demonstrative of these trends, and I would like to record for prosperity my fears that these inmates may perish without the decisive intervention MCC New York is unwilling to provide. I do not know what these men are charged with, nor would such information be of any relevance to their human rights.

            The first man’s initials are R.A. The last that I knew he was in cell 101 on H-Tier of 9-South. My understanding is he suffers from severe mental illness and has been kept in the solitary housing unit for at least two years.  He spends most of his time on the ground, and his hands shake when he reaches for his food. He does not bathe, and his hair and beard are unkempt, to put it mildly.

            One does not need training in clinical psychology to see that Mr. R.A. needs mental health intervention instead of the [inhuman long-term isolation](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/barack-obama-why-we-must-rethink-solitary-confinement/2016/01/25/29a361f2-c384-11e5-8965-0607e0e265ce_story.html) he has suffered. The apathy toward his situation displayed by the medical and psychological health staff here shocks the conscience, and warrants investigation, as where there is one such case, there are probably others.

            The second inmate who requires your immediate intervention is a man I know of as “N” in cell 210 of G-Tier in 9-south. N, a former police officer, used to rescue abused animals, and now the rescuer needs rescuing himself. He was put in a frigid cell for over a week and was unable to bathe due to a cold shower. He has told me the cell was so cold he could see his breath, and compounding the issue, the clothes issued to him by the prison are many sizes too small, leaving him less protected than most.

            As an [obvious result](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/jailed-activist-hacker-hunger-strike_us_58337736e4b058ce7aac9e0c), he developed flu symptoms and asked to see medical staff over a week ago, but they did nothing. Now thanks to a compassionate Lieutenant, N is in a slightly warmer cell, but it’s one of those with significant pools of water. He has developed a severe respiratory infection. In fact, as I was drafting this letter, he called out that he was having chest pains, trouble breathing, and that his emergency call button doesn’t work. I had to push mine to summon help. N was taken out by stretcher and screamed in pain as he was lifted.

            Incredibly, though a physician’s assistant detected multiple irregular heartbeats. N was never seen by a doctor, and they put him back in his cell less than 40 minutes later, discombobulated, undiagnosed, and unmonitored. I fear his flu has developed into pneumonia, and his life is in danger if something is not done soon.

            (Update: Thankfully, N is a fighter, and he has been convalescing without medical help. However, another inmate is now in the same cold cell where N first became ill. The new inmate reports the same frigid conditions.)

            There are also a plethora of more minor, though still significant problems that need to be addressed on an ongoing basis. We are always running out of essential items like toilet paper, sanitation supplies, and clean laundry. There are shortages of milk. On occasion, there aren’t enough meal trays to go around, and they are often cold before they reach the cells. When one inmate raised these issues, a CO threatened him with “extra white sauce” in his next delivery.

            The strategy employed by those in charge of dealing with these problems appears to be one of suppressing this information from the public. Every journalist that requests to interview me is rebuffed, my attorneys and visitors have been turned away, and I am often denied writing supplies. My written requests for phone calls, even to my lawyers, are routinely ignored. Incredibly, I’m even denied the ability to send media mail to Rolling Stone as well, on the supposed grounds that MCC New York has arbitrarily determined they are not a news publication.

            COs mock and openly insult journalists and the vital role their work plays in a democracy. There is an air of impunity that saturates the cell blocks and administrative suites here, and the lack of accountability has become so ingrained in the staff culture that significant changes will be required to erect the necessary ongoing resolutions. I wish I could say these problems are unique to MCC New York, but given the substantially similar issues recently uncovered by the press at neighboring [MDC Brooklyn](http://www.wnyc.org/story/sentenced-prison-trapped-jail/), this lack of accountability appears to be local phenomena.

            I invite each of you to confirm what I have written here with attorneys, current inmates, survivors of this place, as well as their families. As referenced above, given the apparent insufficiency of current oversight procedures at both MCC New York and MDC Brooklyn, I call for full audits of all Bureau of Prisons facilities in this area by all relevant bodies, including random, unannounced surprise inspections, with periodic random follow-up visits to ensure future compliance.

            Let us remember that human rights are not privileges, and further, inmates like former cop N, are afforded due process and therefor are innocent until proven guilty.

            If any of you, or any journalists, have any questions for me, I reply to all inquires I end up receiving.

            Thank you for you diligent investigations into these urgent matters,

Martin “[MartyG](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/freemartyg.com" \t "_blank)” Gottesfeld

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