



August 14, 2020

*Via electronic mail*

Governor Gavin Newsom  
Governor of California  
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
[gavin.newsom@gov.ca.gov](mailto:gavin.newsom@gov.ca.gov)  
[governor@governor.ca.gov](mailto:governor@governor.ca.gov)

Dear Governor Gavin Newsom,

The US Human Rights Network is a national coalition of over 300 grassroots member organizations and hundreds more individual activists who work on a wide array of human rights issues across the country. We work to bring to light human rights abuses that our members fight against on the ground to human rights bodies and mechanisms on the national and international levels, centering the voices of directly affected individuals and groups.

The Network and our undersigned members and partner organizations are reaching out to you in support of the #StopSanQuentinOutbreak Coalition, to express our grave concern for the growing human rights crisis at San Quentin State Prison as relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under your leadership, San Quentin State Prison has become one of the worst COVID-19 hotspots in the United States with at least 2,210 confirmed cases (over half of the prison population) and 25 deaths as of August 14, 2020.<sup>1</sup> According to Amend at UCSF, approximately 1,400 of the 3,547 people who are currently incarcerated at San Quentin have at least one COVID-19 risk factor.<sup>2</sup>

The undersigned civil society organizations support the demands of the incarcerated community at San Quentin State Prison which aim to stop the spread of the coronavirus, beginning with the granting of large-scale releases to begin the process of drastically reducing the overall prison population to below 50% of current capacity. As per Amend at UCSF's recommendations, decreasing the prison population to below 50% would allow every cell in North and West blocks

---

<sup>1</sup> California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Population COVID-19 Tracking.  
<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/covid19/population-status-tracking/>

<sup>2</sup> Amend and Berkeley Public Health. Urgent Memo - Covid-19 Outbreak: San Quentin Prison. June 15, 2020. <https://amend.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/COVID19-Outbreak-SQ-Prison-6.15.2020.pdf>

of San Quentin to be single-room occupancy and for incarcerated people to more properly social distance.<sup>3</sup> We support the full list of eight demands, via this [link](#), from incarcerated people at San Quentin State Prison via the #StopSanQuentinOutbreak campaign, which aims to stop the spread of COVID-19 and to improve the living conditions of incarcerated people during the pandemic and beyond.<sup>4</sup> In order to ensure the health of released people and their communities, upon their release every person must have access to adequate individual housing units that allow for proper social distancing and sanitation.

Living conditions at San Quentin State Prison do not allow for the practice of social distancing, which public health officials have recommended as the only way to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Incarcerated people are not able to stay six feet away from other people, and do not always have access to handwashing stations, hand sanitizer, face masks, or other essential personal protective equipment needed to practice preventative hygiene. The conditions at San Quentin are ripe for the deadly spread of communicable diseases like COVID-19. Compounding this situation is the severe lack of adequate ventilation and sanitation due to San Quentin's antiquated facilities, open-air atrium style buildings which exacerbate the spread of germs, and overcrowding.

San Quentin is not unique in its inability to provide safe conditions for incarcerated people during a global pandemic. Facilities across California including other state prisons, immigration detention centers, and jails are also experiencing issues with overcrowding that would inevitably mean the growth of another fatal outbreak if the Governor and CDCR do not urgently and drastically reduce the number of people incarcerated statewide. The situation at San Quentin has demonstrated that there is no such thing as a "safe transfer," and we must be committed to reducing the prison population across all California facilities, *not* expanding the carceral system by transferring people or opening new prisons that could become COVID-19 hotspots.

You have an obligation to protect the rights of people deprived of their liberty, including the right to health as delineated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 25, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which mandates "the prevention, treatment, and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational, and other diseases."<sup>5</sup> The right to health is inclusive of all people, including those who are incarcerated. The right to health includes access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation; safe food; adequate nutrition and housing; healthy working and environmental conditions; health-related education and information; and gender equality. The right to health also includes the following entitlements: the right to prevention, treatment and control of diseases; access to essential

---

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> #StopSanQuentinOutbreak Coalition. #StopSanQuentinOutbreak Demands.

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1R9EOkvBT\\_CtNiRrPQHry2spdfmZyY2KnAXrPFVge\\_3M/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1R9EOkvBT_CtNiRrPQHry2spdfmZyY2KnAXrPFVge_3M/edit)

<sup>5</sup> Health Affairs. *Protecting Incarcerated People In The Face Of COVID-19: A Health And Human Rights Perspective*. May 1, 2020. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20200428.846534/full/>



medicines; equal and timely access to basic health services of good quality; and the provision of health services, goods, and facilities without any discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

Based on known conditions inside of San Quentin State Prison, the US Human Rights Network believes that many of these basic human rights are being violated and there is a growing human rights crisis at San Quentin under your watch. We stand with the #StopSanQuentinOutbreak coalition, and the people incarcerated at San Quentin and their family members and communities in demanding that CDCR take immediate and urgent action to stop the spread of COVID-19 at San Quentin beginning with granting large-scale releases in order to decrease the prison population to below 50% capacity.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact [shankins@ushrnetwork.org](mailto:shankins@ushrnetwork.org).

Sincerely,

100 Days Action  
Africa World Now Project  
Aging People in Prison Human Rights Campaign  
Alliance of Families for Justice  
Anti-Eviction Mapping Project  
Art and Resistance Through Education (ARTE)  
Best Practices Policy Project  
Casa San Jose  
Center for Constitutional Rights  
Freedom Archives  
Friends of Human Rights  
Georgia Peace & Justice Coalition  
Grassroots Global Justice  
Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights  
Human Rights Network HRN-Nigeria  
Iowa Unitarian Universalist Witness/Advocacy Network  
Malcolm X Center for Self Determination  
Malcolm X Grassroots Movement  
Mercer County Coalition in Support of Amistad Compliance  
Moral High Ground

---

<sup>6</sup> Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and the World Health Organization. *The Right to Health*. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Factsheet31.pdf>



National Homelessness Law Center  
National Lawyers Guild San Francisco Bay Area Chapter  
National Network for Immigrant & Refugee Rights  
New Afrikan People's Organization/Malcolm X Grassroots Organization  
Occupy Bergen County  
Rise Up America  
Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference  
SJSU Human Rights Institute  
Sunny Slaughter Consulting, LLC  
SWOP Behind Bars  
The Franklin Law Group, P.C.  
The Newtown Nation  
The Real Cost of Prisons Project  
Topeka Independent Living Resource Center  
Transgender Advocacy Group  
University of Miami School of Law Human Rights Clinic  
US Human Rights Network  
Victorious Black Women  
Women Lead Network  
Women Watch Afrika, Inc.