



October 23, 2008

Professor Manfred Nowak
Special Rapporteur on Torture
c/o Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations Office at Geneva
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland

Dear Mr. Nowak,

We are writing to bring your attention to the treatment of our client William B. Coleman, a forty eight year old hunger-striking inmate, housed at the MacDougall Correctional Institution, a United States prison. For over thirteen months, Mr. Coleman, a British Citizen, refused solid food in protest of what he believes to be fundamental deficiencies in the state's judicial system. These deficiencies include the allegation that the state can convict individuals of crimes using little more evidence than the testimony of the victim. By refusing food, Mr. Coleman hopes to bring public attention to these matters of societal concern.

In response to Mr. Coleman's protest, the Connecticut Department of Corrections (DOC) moved to obtain, and was awarded in January, a temporary order allowing prison officials broad discretion to force-feed Mr. Coleman without his permission. This order was issued despite Mr. Coleman being deemed mentally competent and having a fully-executed living will, which explicitly states that he is not to be force-fed or resuscitated. His case is set for trial on January 29th and 30th of 2009.

On September 16, 2008, the one year anniversary of the initiation of his hunger strike, Mr. Coleman escalated his protest and began refusing all nutrition, including water. In response to this escalation, the DOC began intravenously inserting artificial hydration, electrolytes and vitamins into Mr. Coleman's body against his will. From September 22 to October 22, Mr. Coleman was given approximately ten intravenous drips.¹

On October 23, the DOC placed Mr. Coleman in an isolated area, where they locked him down in four point restraints and inserted a nasogastric feeding tube into his nose and down his throat. Mr. Coleman described this process as the "worst pain of his life" and said it was "ten times worse than getting a tooth pulled without a sedative." Throughout the force-feeding procedure, Mr. Coleman gagged and choked, tearfully

¹Since the start of his protest, Mr. Coleman has lost approximately 118 pounds and is currently underweight for a healthy adult with his body type.

begging them to stop. At the end of the procedure, the DOC removed the feeding tube and, immediately thereafter, Mr. Coleman began sneezing up blood.

With Mr. Coleman's body weakened from a year-long hunger strike, there are considerable risks to conducting the force-feeding procedure. These risks include major infections, pneumonia, or a collapsed lung.

Force-feeding is universally considered to be a form of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and in some circumstances could even amount to torture, in violation of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which the U.S. ratified in 1994. Forced feeding is also considered to be unethical by the World Medical Association (WMA), of which the American Medical Association is a member. The WMA's Declaration on Hunger Strikers states, "*Forcible feeding is never ethically acceptable. Even if intended to benefit, feeding accompanied by threats, coercion, force or use of physical restraints is a form of inhuman and degrading treatment.*"² In its 1975 Declaration of Tokyo, WMA prohibited force-feeding and advised "where a prisoner refuses nourishment and is considered by the physician as capable of forming an unimpaired and rational judgment concerning the consequences of such a voluntary refusal of nourishment, he or she shall not be fed artificially."

The WMA's subsequent 1991 Declaration of Malta reinforces that "forced feeding contrary to an informed and voluntary refusal is unjustifiable" and recognizes the hunger strike as a "form of protest by people who lack other ways of making their demands known."

We respectfully and urgently request that you review Mr. Coleman's treatment under the Urgent Appeal procedure and advise the U.S. government to refrain from force-feeding Mr. Coleman and allow an independent health professional to immediately monitor Mr. Coleman's hunger strike and evaluate his medical condition in a manner consistent with international ethical and human rights standards. In light of the dire and devastating consequences of the force-feeding on Mr. Coleman, we respectfully request your immediate attention to this case—preferably before the trial date, set for January 29th and 30th of 2009.

Thank you for reviewing this significant human rights violation. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or would like to further discuss this matter.

Respectfully,

Jon Matthews
Legal Director
ACLU-Connecticut

Jamil Dakwar
Director,
ACLU Human Rights Program

² <http://www.wma.net/e/policy/h31.htm>.