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World: North America

Georgia: Attorney claims massive prisoner torture

Class action filed against Valdosta State Prison officials -- cites routine torture of restrained inmates and conspiratorial cover-up

By Spero News 

Tuesday, January 08, 2008



Corrections officer seeking contraband cell phones

Atlanta attorney McNeil Stokes today filed a class action suit against guards and officials from Valdosta State Prison and the Georgia Department of Corrections. The suit names twenty-five prison guards, officers, supervisors, wardens, medical personnel and corrections officials in the routine beatings and torture of restrained inmates and subsequent cover-up of the abuse.

The complaint details gruesome attacks in which prisoners are bound and restrained while guards and members of the special Correctional Emergency Response Team (CERT) kick them with hard-

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toe combat boots, beat them with gloves especially designed for assaults known as "beating gloves," and choke them with night sticks. Two young men have been beaten to death since these series of cases were initially filed.

Abuses in other Georgia prison systems include guards inflicting torture methods known as the "Georgia Motorcycle" whereby an inmate is stripped of clothing and strapped in four or five point restraints to an iron bed or chair for as much as 48 hours without food, water or bathroom facilities; and a method known as the "Georgia G-string" whereby inmates are stripped and a chain is cinched around their testicles for hours at a time, leaving them in excruciating pain.

A former guard from Rogers State Prison has described these beatings as a "sport" throughout the correctional system. Inmates listed as Level IV mental health prisoners are often targeted because of the behavior caused by their mental disabilities. Medical treatment is either denied to the victims or, if administered, is not reported to prevent an official record of the abuse.

Stokes, who recently won a case against Rogers State Prison in Georgia, thereby ending inmate abuse at that facility, is determined to protect prisoners' rights throughout the state. "These beatings are a blood-sport among the correctional officers involved," explains Stokes. "The victims (men and women) are shackled with their hands behind their backs or otherwise restrained while the CERT officers inflict the most horrendous torture. The Georgia correctional system, including Internal Affairs and the Attorney General, think they can continue covering this up, but it is going to stop. It must stop. It's that simple."

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The claim describes a pattern and practice of torturing restrained inmates that serves no penological purpose utilizing premeditated violence including but not limited to:

- slamming inmates on the ground and running their heads into walls and doors;
- using profanity with racial and sexual innuendos;

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-- not following Standard Operating Procedures on use of video camera;
-- beating prisoners in surreptitious locations such as showers, alcoves, and empty



rooms;

- covering up beating in use of force reports;
- instructing medical staff to cover up beatings;
- covering up and condoning beatings by wardens and deputy wardens of security;
- covering up of beatings by internal affairs;
- putting inmates who have been beaten in lockdown segregation facilities to avoid observation of their injuries;
- not allowing inmates who have been beaten to see their families or to have picture taken of their injuries;
- thwarting prison grievance procedure to cover up beatings and prevent exhaustion of grievances by inmates who have been beaten so that they cannot maintain causes of action in court.

Defendants in the Valdosta Class Action suit include Commissioner James Donald; Rick Jacobs; Sarah Draper; Sr. Sharon Lewis, MD; Warden Hart; Deputy Warden McLaughlin; Albert Jones; Captain Morris; Lt. Maine; Officer Powell; Officer Jesse Howell; Officer T. Brown; Officer Yancey; Officer Cannon; Officer Snake; Officer Smith; Officer Shane; Officer Grainger; Officer Radclif

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