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Jamaica Parliament Ministers say:

“our prisons are dungeons; the institutions are literally falling apart. They are outdated and dilapidated, with limited scope for rehabilitation, severely overcrowded; substandard, and inhumane.”

Jamaica Parliament Senator says:

“residents would not keep their dogs in conditions in which our young men are held.”

Slavery Lingers In Western Prisons

Sam Speranza, Contributor

RECENTLY IN Honduras, more than 300 poor souls died at 'hell on earth'; or to be accurate, during a fiery prison calamity that evolved from basic food preparation into a horrible conflagration. This commentator cannot forget that violation against humanity, and more personally, a separate but also inhumane tribulation against my freedom and my family.

Recently, I was unjustly charged with a crime in Jamaica. Without due process, or even time to alert my family, I was arrested, charged, jailed, and incarcerated in a 'rathole' for nine days.

Those nine nights sleeping on concrete floors and wooden slabs changed my life forever, simply because I now TRULY comprehend, for the first time in my life, the genuine meaning of freedom. I'll be better for it, because as the philosophers say, "your worst experiences shape who you are and whether you'll survive or not".

So I'll be OK if my health recovers, but what of the millions of prisoners throughout the Americas and the entire hemisphere caged as dangerous animals? Do they deserve their fate because they injured others within society?

I suspect the answer must be analysed in two parts.

First, are the prisoners GUILTY of an offence against society. Or, merely CHARGED and waiting for justice? Isn't it every human's precept to believe another is innocent unless and until proven guilty? While this basic rationale is assumed to prevail within the United States of America, there are many examples otherwise throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Universal euphemism

For instance, the Honduras prison inhabitants were mostly being held for 'legal processing', which is a universal euphemism for being flushed down the toilet. Only a tiny fraction of the 300 dead fathers and sons had been CONVICTED of anything illegal. Most were less privileged and unfortunates who were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In my case, our prison contained 64 arrested and anxiety-ridden detainees, ALL waiting for 'legal processing' of one kind or another, like the accused murderer who has been in jail for four years, hoping against hope that some good Samaritan will post bail. If not, his incarceration could go on indefinitely. All the while waiting, his family suffers inexorably without father and breadwinner.

Another example: my cell block contained a dozen including myself. After a few days of their kindness, help, and compassion, it was apparent to me that most were decent folks who may have made an error in judgement, or acted out of desperation, or were falsely accused like myself. Certainly, some were bums capable of anything. But 'capable' is not to be confused with 'convicted'. All humans deserve their right to legally defend themselves in a court of competent jurisdiction.

treated like wild tigers

My prison, as previously described, contained NO recently convicted criminals. Yet, all the detainees were treated like wild tigers threatening a schoolyard and witnessed:

Three prisoners in a cell.

Entire cell space is the same size as most bathrooms.

Two wooden-slab bunk beds; no sheets; no blankets.

Two in the bunk beds; one occupying the concrete floor.

Awake at 4 a.m. to a cold-water shower (separate room).

Slices of bread with tea for breakfast.

One meal later in the day.

NO exercise at any time.

NO sunlight at any time.

NO writing materials to prepare a legal defence.

NO telephones to prepare a legal defence.



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NO telephones or text messages to family or friends.

NO access to family or friends, except weekends.

NO personal time with family or friends.

All visitor communications cannot exceed 30 minutes.

These communications involve standing next to a chain link fence shouting to your visitor 20 feet away.

While I never experienced 'privatised commercial slavery', it probably was similar in many aspects to the "government slavery" at my penal institution.

While law-enforcement personnel in contemporary prisons are better trained and regulated, the day-long inactivity plus boredom are definitely brewing and percolating asylums for the insane. As the Bible says: "man shall not live by bread alone". While this rule of life can have many interpretations, in my case, working as a slave in a field of vegetables would be preferable to my prison's degradation of mind, spirit, vitality, and physical asset.

Many commentators in West Indian society have also shrugged shoulders at the inhumane prison treatment by suggesting the conditions are a "potent deterrent against crime". WHAT?

Has current society forgotten why their forefathers bravely struggled, fought, and eventually prevailed against the yoke of slavery? Don't they recognise the European settlers adopted this identical alibi when chaining slave prisoners for any reason imaginable?

What happened to West Indies hero Sam Sharpe's admonition to his followers: "give me justice or give me death"? Or the cautionary advice of Martin Luther King: "let no man rekindle slavery under the guise of protecting the rights of another"?

In summary, it's timely for citizens everywhere to let governments know injustice will not stand; whether on the streets or in the jails or the courts. That age-proven axiom: "There, except for the grace of God, go I" is not a TV-serial quip. I learned first-hand that today's freedom smile can be shattered by circumstances never anticipated.
