

Statement Presented to Congressional Briefing, June 22, 1965

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We appear here today as representatives of the National Council of Churches of Christ. For two hours yesterday, June 21st, we inspected what we can only describe as a concentration camp in which were incarcerated hundreds of citizens of the United States of America.

This concentration camp is located within the continental borders of the United States and is being operated with the full support of one of our state governments and apparently with the full knowledge of the government of the United States.

We learned to our horror and disgust of the systematic efforts to dehumanize, demoralize and degrade these citizens which were being perpetrated by the police officials of the City of Jackson and the State of Mississippi. We heard how many of the male prisoners were forced to run a gauntlet --- a double line of police swinging clubs and balck jocks. We heard of a woman dragged across the bare concrete floor in full view of the other female prisoners, her clothes partially ripped from her, her private parts exposed, her body beaten and kicked by police.

We were told of the young man who was lying down bleeding from a blow to the head. When other prisoners suggested that a doctor be called, one of the guards swore at him and kicked him in the head.

Fear was induced by a policeman with a bullwhip which he cracked again and again. Morale was undermined by separating all the leaders and removing them to another penitentiary. Exhaustion was achieved by waking the prisoners to the cold air of huge blowers and repeatedly awaking them throughout the night by banging nightsticks on garbage cans, amplifying music over bullhorns. For the first six days of their confinement the prisoners had no blankets and only one narrow mattress for each of three prisoners. Sometimes extra mattresses were piled in a corner but not distributed, though many were sleeping on the concrete.

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The female prisoners were subjected to constant lewd and suggestive remarks, including promises of release in return for sexual favors. Women asking for medical attention were subjected to physical examination in full view of staring policemen. Medicine prescribed by the doctor was delivered, and, often, requests for medical treatment were totally ignored.

In Jackson, Mississippi, we saw --with our own eyes--fellow countrymen who were forced to remain all day on an absolutely bare concrete floor--denied even the opportunity to stretch out for a moment's rest on mattresses laid out only a few feet away.

We saw--with our own eyes--these individuals subjected to a brutal "gassing" euphemistically termed a fumigation by Jackson Police. We saw--and were ourselves subjected to ---a choking, eye-smarting cloud of gaseous fumes 10 to 15 feet high, which emanating from a state spraying machine, rolled through the compound.

We saw--with our own eyes--stitches in scalps which closed the gashes inflicted by the clubs of policemen.

We talked with these prisoners and learned that no fresh fruit, no fresh milk, and no meat except for one bologna sandwich per prisoner on one day had been served within that compound since the first persons were interned in it seven days ago.

These human beings were being subjected to a diet of grits and syrup for breakfast, beans and corn for lunch, and beans again for dinner, day after day after day.

We have made a through investigation of the Jackson Compound; we have talked with over a hundred prisoners confined within it; and we have read some 35 affidavits from citizens confined within its walls. We are absolutely convinced that the primarily purpose of the Jackson concentration camp is not to serve as a place of incarceration, but rather to serve as a place to break the spirit, the will, the health and even the body of each individual who dared to assemble peaceably to seek a redress of grievances.

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We are not unmindful of the difficulties which any City encounters when faced with the problem of imprisoning hundred more persons than its jails can handle. It is our belief, however, that Jackson would not face any jail overcrowding problem were it not for their policy of making instantaneous arrests on charges which are patently unconstitutional. But even if this were not the case, the difficulties of

providing for an exceptionally large number of prisoners do not justify the sadistic practices of the Jackson police and the Mississippi Highway Patrol. These depraved practices violate every law enforcement principal of civilized society, and are an affront to human decency.

American citizens who have not seen with their own eyes and heard with their own ears what we saw and heard yesterday, would not believe that such conditions would be practiced and tolerated anywhere in the United States of America. But these conditions do exist. They exist as a scandal to the nation and as an outrage to God.

Every effort must be made by our national government to eliminate such conditions immediately. And if the government finds that it has not the power under existing laws to see that they are halted at once, then these putrageous conditions must serve as an unmistakable mandate to the Congress to pass the legislation necessary to purge them forever from the national scene.

We are a democracy, not a fascist state, and concentration camps such as the one now existing in Jackson, Mississippi, have no place in our country. This one must be closed at once.