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Governor Pat Quinn
Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706
USA

28 August 2009

Dear Governor Pat Quinn

TAMMS MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON

Amnesty International wrote to you last April to express concern about Tamms maximum security facility (CMAX). I enclose a copy of the letter we sent to the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), which contains a number of recommendations.

We welcome the review of the prison which you have asked to be undertaken by Michael Randle, Director of the IDOC. We are urging that this address both conditions and the criteria for transferring prisoners to and from the facility, issues which have been of longstanding concern among penal reformers, members of the state legislature and the community.

Amnesty International remains concerned by the prolonged and indefinite nature of the isolation endured by many prisoners at Tamms. We are also deeply concerned by continuing reports that prisoners with mental illness are held at Tamms and denied proper diagnosis or treatment. This is despite IDOC regulations allowing the exclusion of people with serious mental illness from the facility. There are persistent reports of prisoners exhibiting disturbed or psychotic behaviour while confined alone to their high security cells, including smearing faeces and acts of self mutilation, yet few prisoners have reportedly been placed in the prison's special treatment unit.

Amnesty International reiterates its concern that the conditions prevailing in Tamms -- in which prisoners are held in cellular confinement in stark surroundings for months or years, with little exercise or human contact, and no work, religious or educational programs -- flout international standards for humane treatment. Such conditions have been found to cause serious psychological and physical harm even to those with no pre-existing health problems and can be particularly cruel and damaging in the case of individuals who are mentally ill. Failure to treat prisoners who are mentally ill contravenes international standards requiring that everyone should have access to the highest attainable standard of mental health care.

We are further concerned by reports that, although Tamms was intended to house dangerous prisoners who commit acts of violence in other prisons, many of those transferred there have not committed such crimes. According to an investigation by the *Belleville News-Democrat*, more than half the 247 inmates listed in the prison's register in June 2009 had not been convicted of a crime after entering the prison system. A significant proportion of the remainder had committed acts such as throwing bodily wastes or struggling with guards which did not result in serious injury and which in some cases could be attributed to mental illness.

We urge that as Governor of the State of Illinois you ensure that safeguards are put in place to ensure that all those held in the custody of the IDOC are treated humanely, and that transfers of prisoners to

highly restrictive settings such as Tamms are appropriately regulated. Such measures should include fair and transparent procedures for transfers to and from Tamms, with due process hearings and effective oversight. In particular we urge that

- prisoners with serious mental illness are not placed at Tamms supermax facility.
- no prisoner is held in long-term isolation unless shown to be a clear and present danger to other prisoners or staff or to the safe operation of other institutions.
- you support measures to improve conditions and quality of life for all inmates at Tamms, including better exercise, more opportunities for education and self-improvement, and allowing phone calls and contact visits and some form of group activity where possible. Such measures would assist in providing opportunities for prisoners to earn their way out of the facility as was its original purpose. They would also be consistent with international standards which emphasize the importance of all prisoners engaging in activities for their mental and physical wellbeing in order to enhance rehabilitation and prepare individuals for their eventual return to society.
- We also wish to endorse the recommendation made by legislators, mental health advocates and civic and faith groups that a Commission appointed by the Mental Health Division of the Illinois Department of Human Services should be charged with reviewing mental health policy, standards and treatment at Tamms, and any other prison where persons with mental illness may be held in isolation.

We hope that you will act on these recommendations and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Lee
Program Director
Americas Regional Program

Cc Michael P. Randle, Director, Illinois Department of Corrections
Yolande Johnson, Warden, Tamms Correctional Centre