



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

Position Statement: Hunger Strikes and Forced Feeding

As a rehabilitation center that has extended healing care to more than 30,000 survivors of torture and severe war-related atrocities in 30 years, the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) supports a safe environment where detainees held in custody are treated humanely and in accordance with domestic and international laws and obligations under the Convention Against Torture, the Geneva Conventions and other international human rights and humanitarian standards.

Prison hunger strikes have occurred in democratic and totalitarian regimes around the world for hundreds of years. Prisoners in indefinite detention, at risk of torture, or who are held in other extreme conditions have resorted to hunger strikes or fasts to death as a way to publicize and create conditions for negotiations of grievances. Prison hunger strikes are often organized or understood as a form of political protest. Notable strikes have occurred during the course of civil and human rights struggles. Currently, they are a focus of concern at the United States' detention center at Guantánamo Bay.

The World Medical Association, an international congress of 102 national medical associations, has adopted two documents that address the treatment of prisoners who are on hunger strikes.

The International Committee of the Red Cross endorses these World Medical Association statements.

CVT endorses the World Medical Association standards on prison hunger strikes.

Specifically, CVT endorses the World Medical Association's **Guidelines for Physicians Concerning Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in Relation to Detention and Imprisonment** ([Declaration of Tokyo](#)) stating in part:

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 decision as to the capacity of the prisoner to form such a judgment should be confirmed by at least one other independent physician. The consequences of the refusal of nourishment shall be explained by the physician to the prisoner.

CVT also endorses the World Medical Association's [Declaration of Malta on Hunger Strikers](#) and its accompanying *Guidelines for the Management of Hunger Strikers*.

CVT takes the position that forced feeding of hunger strikers in violation of these standards is a breach of various bans on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

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