



February 5, 2009

VIA EMAIL: inspector.general@usdoj.gov

Glenn A. Fine
Department of Justice
Office of the Inspector General
ATTN: Civil Rights & Civil Liberties Complaints
950 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Room 4706
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Request for Investigation into Violations at the Reeves County Detention Center

Dear Inspector General Fine:

We are writing on behalf of the National Prison Project of the ACLU and the ACLU of Texas regarding recent disturbances at the Reeves County Detention Center (RCDC) in Pecos, Texas. RCDC is a facility under contract with the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), and oversight over RCDC falls squarely within your jurisdiction. In light of the history of problems at this facility, we strongly urge you to investigate the facility's response to the recent disturbances at RCDC as well as the conditions that may have led to the unrest.

According to media reports, prisoners at RCDC began to riot on January 31, 2009, due to poor medical care at the prison. Betsy Blaney, *Company Says Texas Prison's Damage "Significant,"* ASSOCIATED PRESS, Feb. 3, 2009. The disturbance involved buildings that house more than 2000 prisoners and was not brought under control until the afternoon of February 1. GEO Group, Inc., the private prison company that operates RCDC, reports that no injuries occurred during the riot, but the Reeves County Sheriff's Office counters that at least three prisoners were hospitalized, one with a severed finger. CNN, *Texas Riot Quelled; Inmates Damage Buildings*, Feb. 1, 2009. Thousands of prisoners were forced to sleep outside on the prison yard in the days after the riot was brought under control, and hundreds still remain on the yard. According to the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, prisoners on the yard are being fed only once a day and have extremely limited access to water and toilets.

This marks the second serious disturbance in as many months at the west Texas prison. In December, apparently in response to a death at the facility, prisoners rioted and demanded adequate medical care and food. Staff Report, *Both Hostages Released at Reeves County*

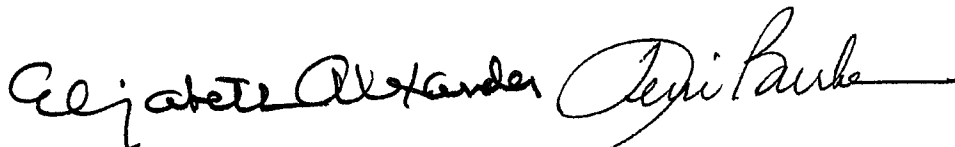
Detention Center, NEWSWEST9, Dec. 13, 2008. Despite intense media interest in the recent riot, little information is being made publicly available.

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has investigated serious problems at RCDC in the past. Several years ago, an OIG investigation by the El Paso Field Office resulted in the arrest of five contract officers at RCDC. According to the OIG's Semi-Annual Report to Congress, the investigation found that "three correctional officers accepted money from inmates in exchange for smuggling contraband into the detention center, a fourth correctional officer was sexually involved with an inmate, and a fifth correctional officer was sexually involved with an inmate and accepted money from him and other inmates for smuggling marijuana into the detention center." Office of the Inspector General, Semiannual Report to Congress, Apr. 1, 2006-Sept. 30, 2006.

Prison riots are relatively rare occurrences. For this reason, two serious disturbances within a two-month period at a single facility is sufficient cause for great concern about RCDC. It is imperative that the OIG investigate the prisoners' complaints of inadequate medical care and other poor conditions at RCDC to protect against any future problems at the facility and to restore public confidence. Such an investigation should focus both on the immediate causes of the disturbances as well as the root causes, which may involve poor conditions ranging from inadequate medical care to poor food, ventilation, etc. Moreover, the investigation should address the appropriateness of the facility's immediate response to both of the recent disturbances, and any actions taken by the facility in the brief period of time in between the two events. Such an inquiry could look at issues related to training, staffing, and use of force policies.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to a prompt, written response.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Alexander
Director
ACLU National Prison Project
Washington, D.C.

Terri Burke
Executive Director
ACLU of Texas
Austin, TX