



*“Descending the steps into this underground prison, escorted by prison staff who guide one through electrified gates and doors and past camera after camera, one enters what feels like a tomb. As each door slams shut, the feeling intensifies that one is about to be buried alive.”*

*Described by a visiting attorney, this was the notorious federal Lexington Control Unit, an experimental subterranean sensory deprivation prison for women political prisoners. The mission of the Lexington Control Unit was described in a report by the American Civil Liberties Union: “to reduce prisoners to the state of submission essential for their ideological conversion...that failing, the only alternative is to destroy them, preferably by making them desperate enough to destroy themselves.” After two years of public outcry, including denunciation by Amnesty International, church denominations, and a number of governments, the special prison was closed by order of a federal judge in August 1988. But for the women of the Lexington Control Unit, Alejandrina Torres, Susan Rosenberg, and Silvia Baraldini, the nightmare isn't over.*

Shutting down the Control Unit was a great human rights victory. In punishment, the Bureau of Prisons did not transfer the women to general population. Instead Director Michael Quinlan sent the women to Metropolitan Correctional Centers, designed for short-term detention for those awaiting trial or transfer. These facilities are not fit for long-term prisoners, and certainly not for these women who had deteriorated so seriously in the Control Unit:

- Alejandrina Torres lost forty pounds, her heart condition worsened, and she virtually lost the use of one arm which was medically neglected after injury in an earlier severe beating by the guards
- Susan Rosenberg suffered serious weight loss and vision problems
- Silvia Baraldini developed a deadly form of uterine cancer, which was detected and treated only after a struggle to obtain proper medical attention

- All three women carry the emotional scars of sexual humiliation while imprisoned, ranging from being assaulted by male guards who held them down for rectal and vaginal finger probes, to being watched in the shower by male guards using a video surveillance camera.

What are the conditions in the Metropolitan Correctional Centers where the women are being held?

- Pitifully short visiting hours. When Alejandrina's children and husband traveled thousands of miles to visit her, they were permitted to enter one hour per day!
- No sun or fresh air. Susan Rosenberg was kept inside for over one year.
- Inability to form meaningful relationships because of constant turnover of prisoners
- Most seriously, these facilities have no proper medical facilities, but only dispensaries.

As the Bureau of Prisons is fully aware, under these conditions the women will only continue to physically deteriorate.

There is another threat hanging in the air, particularly if the government wins its appeal of the Lexington ruling. The Bureau of Prisons has indicated its intention to transfer the three women and other women political prisoners to a new maximum security prison in Marianna, Florida, under conditions that were "pilot tested" in Lexington. Marianna is indeed the horrible offspring of the Control Unit, with 104 women doubled up in space for 54, so that two women share an aisle of floor space only one yard wide.

Remarkably, Alejandrina, Susan, and Silvia have kept their spirit of resistance intact. These women's strength was forged in lifelong political activism: Alejandrina as a Puerto Rican community and church activist and fighter for Puerto Rican independence; Susan and Silvia in the Viet Nam anti-war movement, women's movement and solidarity with Black and Puerto Rican liberation.

Two questions stand out. First, can such women be broken? Through the experiment at Lexington and a continuing war of attrition, this is what the government is seeking to find out. Second, will we in the community sit back passively and accept such dehumanization? Let's join Alejandrina, Susan and Silvia to say NO!

- Write or send a telegram to Michael Quinlan, Director of the Bureau of Prisons, 320 1st St NW, Washington DC 20001, (202) 724-3250.
- Send a message of support to the sisters:  
Silvia Baraldini, #05125-054, MCC, 150 Park Row, N.Y., N.Y. 10007  
Susan Rosenberg, #233-412, 1901 D. Street S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003  
Alejandrina Torres, #92152-024, MCC, San Diego, 808 Union St., San Diego, CA 92101
- Find out how to become involved in Freedom Now, a new campaign which has brought together scores of political prisoners, families and human rights activists to demand amnesty and human rights for political prisoners in the US.
- Arrange a video showing for your friends or group.

**MOVE ALEJANDRINA, SUSAN, AND SILVIA TO GENERAL POPULATION**

***Freedom Now: Campaign for Amnesty and Human Rights  
for Political Prisoners in the US***

5249 N Kenmore, Chicago IL 60640, (312) 278-6706.

1560 Broadway Suite 807, N.Y., N.Y.

3543 18th St. #17, San Francisco, CA 94110