

Prisoners' Voices Blocked and Censorship in U.S. Prisons

By Jaan Laaman

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The United States is often called the country of prisons because we are five percent of the world's population, but the U.S. holds 25 percent of all the prisoners in the world. Recently we have heard talk from the White House and Congress about the need to reduce this huge prison population, which is costing the taxpayers billions.

Occasionally you might hear a prisoner's voice on some media platform, usually a Human Rights or community outlet. These present words are written by Jaan Laaman. I am a long held political prisoner presently locked up in the U.S. Penitentiary in Tucson, Arizona. Let me be very clear, prisoners have a hard time getting our words and thoughts out from behind America's many, many prison walls. While prisoners do have a legal right to express their thoughts and report on issues and abuses, actually getting your words out is often very hard or impossible.

All incoming and outgoing prisoner communication, postal mail, phone calls and some restricted email services that some prison systems allow, are all opened and monitored. This is authorized by regulations and law. Further censorship and outright blocking of communications and publications, also routinely occurs in prisons throughout this country.

Letters, magazines and books critical of government policies and wars are often not delivered, even if official policy states that prisoners are allowed these materials. Sometimes a prisoner has all his or her phone or email communications arbitrarily shut off for months. While an official appeal channel is usually available, these are biased at best and could easily be labelled a kangaroo court process. Communications would be shut down for months, even if the prisoner ultimately wins appeal and has his or her communications restored.

Censoring, restricting and flat out blocking communications, especially of political prisoners, is a harsh and dangerous reality going on now, in prisons all across this country. My own voice, which has previously been heard on radio and in print over many years, has been almost totally cut off since February. No official explanation has been given, other than, that prison authorities do not like my commentaries and essays. Freedom of speech---Freedom of expression, for America's prisoners is a constant struggle!

These words are from Jaan Laaman and I hope I can, once again, speak more directly to you in the future.

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Jaan Laaman (10372-016)
P.O. Box 24550
Tucson, AZ 85734