Yet, nothing is provided for alleviating the acute shortages of basic amenities of life for the less privilege.

Why don’t we start thinking of re-channeling these energies and hard resources towards providing enabling environment for a peaceful and more productive society, where everybody will have a sense of belonging.

One more, thank you for listening.

A CALL FOR THE ABOLITION OF PRISONS

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"Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted".

Eight Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

If, as Dostoyevski said, "the degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering it's prisons", then it seems reasonable to say that the degree of justice in a society can be judged the same way. And if prisons are in themselves, monstrously inhuman and cruel (even if not unusual) then as long as we have prisons, we live in an unjust society.

"And so, we will have to listen to the prisoners to decide if what they are living in is torture, and if therefore, not just because the Supreme Court once said it, but because human compassion demands it, the practice of imprisoning people to punish them for past actions must end." Zinn, Howard, The Zinn Reader, p.434, Seven Stories Press, 632 Broadway, New York, NY 100 12 The quote by Howard Zinn strongly suggests that people listen and learn from people like me. I am a life-sentenced prisoner in America, incarcerated for over twenty-five years. During the past twenty years, and upon completing undergraduate and graduate college programs, I became an abolitionist.

The least controversial observation that one can make about American criminal justice today is that it is remarkably ineffective, absurdly expensive, grossly inhumane, and riddled with ruthlessness and racism. I am convinced that the prison system is both a cause and a result of violence and social injustice. If ninety percent of the criminal justice apparatus were to close down, I strongly believe there would probably be a huge decrease in the amount of behavior presently labeled "criminal". The time has come to fully expose and abolish the game of crime and punishment, and put into place a workable and acceptable paradigm of personal healing, dignity, responsibility, and selfempowerment.

The criminal justice system gets to define what is dangerous. It claims to fight the most important harms to society, and it suggests there are no alternatives except more of the same. If one thing unites all abolitionists, it is a desire to provide an alternative vision and to place on the floor of public debate the idea that there are other ways of looking at
crime and other ways to work with those that commit crime. We must continue to reject as solutions to crime short term measures such as tougher laws and increased incarceration. Major structural and cultural changes within society are essential steps to reducing criminality. Major social change is the most effective way both to reduce all types of crime and to eliminate the unequal administration of justice. Let us look at the flaws in the makeup of a society that breeds, creates, sustains, and profits from crime and criminals. Let us continue to challenge the political, economic, and cultural status quo.

Abolitionists should ask themselves and others the following seven questions:

1. Who has the real power in society?
2. Do those who wield power and authority get away with murder (both literally and figuratively)?
3. What do social class and poverty have to do with crime?
4. Why do affluent people commit so many crimes?
5. Is our system of criminal justice fair?
6. Are people well informed or deluded about the nature of crime?
7. What do racism and sexism have to do with crime? Can the struggle to abolish prisons be thought of in the same manner as was the struggle for the abolition of slavery in America? Does such a movement have any chance of advancing? How can our aims be summarized in ways that will attract and touch the hearts of prisoners, their families, and supporters? Few have found the right words to project a future without prisons.

We must start by find new words in order to rediscover the sense of what needs to be changed. Our long term goal is to bring about the decomposition of a system of immoral and corrupt political loyalties that continue to persist inside the ruling elite, characterizing most of the political systems worldwide. I truly believe that the people attending this conference can create both short and long range workable and acceptable social policy that is not suffocated by narrow limitation imposed by the stigmas of reform run amok. In my view, one cannot be a recovering reformist and an absolute abolitionist at the same time.

My stance as to the police carceral apparatus, or the penal system, in the U.S. is that it should be dismantled. Not because it is beyond reform but because reform itself is beyond the point. Reform is a symptomatic treatment that not only fails to attack the root of the problem, which is the conceptualization of the system itself, the ideology of prisons and policing, the ideology of crime and punishment.

The penal system, whether reformed or not, is indefensible. To the extent that any system, institution, role, or assignment deprives people of dignity, solidarity, and compassion, dehumanizes and mechanizes them, be it work or slavery, being policed or being imprisoned, being a guard or a superintendent, it means it’s time to abolish it. Prisons should be abolished because it is not acceptable or justifiable to
employ people to brutalize and cage other people, in the name of "justice".

The idea of penal abolition hits one of the hardest knots to break in the mainstream narratives that imprisons our minds so that penal practices and institutions come to be seen as second nature, to the extent that life as we know it becomes unthinkable without them. Herbert Marcuse once said that the effects of capitalism have sunk down to the instinctual structure of human beings, in that capitalism has created a second nature to people which ties them libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form even at the danger of their own destruction. Capitalism is not only a prison but also the reason that prisons as we know them are the way they are. Further, capitalism is the one reason for the creation of "prisons" that we fail to identify as prisons most of the time.

From the above observations and personal experiences I draw several conclusions. First, the struggle against capital, and for prisoners, the poor, and the oppressed exists in all social relations and circuits. Thus a strategy must consider the relationships among all the circuits and how to strengthen them against the capital. Second, since the essence of capital is the creation of work, the struggle is centuries old and predates capital and continues throughout capitalism. We must rethink ourselves and recreate ourselves through struggles.

To move ahead, I suggest some basic steps and strategies.

Urging and supporting efforts to end discrimination and violence against women throughout our culture.

Analyze anticapitalist struggles from ecological and feminist perspectives. Using the analysis of capital's strategies and development to learn to avoid capitalist traps.

Call for a repeal of the death penalty at all levels of authority and demand a new trial for Mumia Jamal.

Call for the dismantling of the prison industrial complex and the substitution of meaningful education and obtraining programs in all federal, state, and local prisons.

Demand an end to the wasteful "War on Drugs" which has led to discrimination against communities of color and expansion of the prison populations. We should also call for the decriminalization of drug use and for the commitment of major resources to treatment, and education to deal with the drug problem.

Translation as well as developing a new political and abolitionist language, so that we can communicate more clearly. Exchange knowledge, (not just information). This and also participate in them. Sharing through political organizations and developing supportive and cooperative relations among many organizations.

All this great work requires patience and humility. I hope this paper will give some wisdom and spark new energy, creativity, and commitment to the struggle to abolish prisons. Thank you, TIYO