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**LETTER SENT TO THE U.N. SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR AGAINST TORTURE:
GROUP ARGUES DEATH ROW CONSTITUTES TORTURE AND REQUESTS
INVESTIGATION OF ANGOLA PENITENTIARY**

NEW ORLEANS – Today the Loyola New Orleans Human Rights Advocacy Project sent a Communication to the United Nations Special Rapporteur Against Torture Juan Mendez, urging him to investigate human rights violations at Angola Penitentiary. This effort is in line with recent developments in the international community to characterize the “death row phenomenon” as torture and therefore a violation of human rights law.

The letter was signed by a number of prominent anti-death penalty activists including Sister Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking*; Dr. Alex Mikulich, Roman Catholic theologian and social ethicist at the Jesuit Social Research Institute; long-time Louisiana capital defense attorneys Denise LeBoeuf and Nick Trenticosta, Angelle Adams, President of the Board of Directors of the Texas Coalition Against the Death Penalty; Marjorie Esman, Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana; Chandra McCormick and Keith Calhoun, photo-documentarians of conditions at Angola; Calvin Duncan, of the Louisiana Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty and an Angola exoneree; and many others.

The letter places the State of Louisiana within the context of the epidemic of mass incarceration in the United States, highlighting its infamous status as the prison capital of the world. It characterizes the conditions on Angola’s death row as torture, or, at a minimum, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment under the Convention Against Torture. As a party to this Treaty, the United States is legally bound by its prohibitions. These prohibitions include prolonged solitary confinement; decades spent awaiting death; and deliberate physical and psychological abuse. Examples of such abuse are provided through the experiences of Angola death row exonerees John Thompson and Glenn Ford.

The goal of the letter is to bring international attention to the treatment of death row inmates at Angola, a prison that is highly symbolic of the racial and socio-economic

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dynamics of mass incarceration and capital punishment in the United States. The characterization of “death row phenomenon” as torture is a new front in the overall effort to abolish the death penalty.

Loyola law professor Jeanne Woods, who supervises the Human Rights Advocacy Project, stated:

Evolving international human rights standards helped to persuade the U.S. Supreme Court to end executions of juvenile offenders. We are hoping that similar international scrutiny will help us to abolish the death penalty and solitary confinement in Louisiana and in the United States generally.

A copy of the letter is attached.

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The Loyola University New Orleans College of Law Human Rights Advocacy Project focuses on the training of lawyers who can contribute to the global struggle for justice and human dignity. It works directly with local, national and international non-governmental organizations.