

## MILWAUKEE JEWISH COUNCIL

### HUMAN RIGHTS FOR PRISONERS

The abysmal conditions that make life intolerable for both guards and prisoners at institutions throughout the nation must be corrected. The recent rebellion by prisoners at the Attica Correctional Facility, with the tragic deaths of 43 hostages and inmates, highlights the need for the introduction of reforms, to insure the safety of both correctional officials and inmates, that have been recommended by investigating commissions and international penological experts for years.

We hail the action of Pennsylvania's Attorney General, J. Shane Creamer, in promulgating a "Bill of Rights" for prisoners in Pennsylvania state prisons that will insure them the right to be treated with dignity as human beings while imprisoned. We call upon the U.S. Attorney General and the Attorneys-General of the other 49 states to follow this example. We also urge Congress, the state legislatures and governors to enact similar standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners. We urge all nations to adopt similar measures.

The "Bill of Rights" promulgated by Mr. Creamer takes the form of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners adopted by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in 1955 and considered by the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Criminal Offenders in Kyoto, Japan, in 1970. The U.S. delegation took the position, which we endorse, that the U.N. General Assembly should endorse the rules and "urge member states to take appropriate action toward their implementation."

The standard minimum rules prohibit racial or religious discrimination, require separation of untried and convicted inmates as well as separating youthful offenders from hardened criminals. They prohibit corporal punishment as well as punishment by "handcuffs, chains, irons or straitjackets." They declare that no punishment shall be imposed unless the inmate has "been informed of the offense alleged against him and given a proper opportunity of presenting his defense." They clearly state that untried prisoners are "presumed to be innocent and should be treated as such."

We must not allow the tragedy of Attica to move us to repression. Instead we must intensify speedy reforms, so that prisons will no longer create embittered, angry, hopeless people, but rather be a real force in the process of rehabilitation. Adoption of the United Nation's Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners would safeguard both correctional officers and inmates and would provide America with a unique opportunity to assert its moral leadership among the nations of the world.