



For Immediate Release
December 15, 2006

Contact: Mark Glaze
(202) 271-0982

**BIPARTISAN COMMISSION EMPHASIZES “ZERO-TOLERANCE APPROACH”
TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN U.S. IMMIGRATION FACILITIES**

Panel Also Urges Improved Training, Accountability for Prison Personnel

Los Angeles, CA – The National Prison Rape Elimination Commission (NPREC) today released the following statement at the conclusion of two days of hearings on sexual violence in immigration detention facilities and the role of labor and corrections officials in furthering the goals of the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003:

“Prison rape is a problem in varying degrees throughout the nation’s correctional facilities, but far too little scrutiny has been given to the special problems of sexual violence in our immigration detention centers.

“Foreign-born detainees involved in immigration cases are often particularly vulnerable because of language barriers, isolation and inadequate access to legal counsel and non-governmental organizations. The testimony we heard this week underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to reducing the problem of sexual violence in immigration facilities.

“Above all, we are grateful for the courageous testimony given by a victim of sexual assault in an immigration facility. Her story reminds us that the United States values the basic human rights and dignity of all people, including those in detention. One instance of rape is too many.

“We also appreciate the testimony we heard regarding the role of prison personnel in implementing the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003, which requires affirmative steps to reduce sexual violence behind bars. Acts of sexual violence perpetrated by staff upon inmates remain a disheartening problem, as does the failure of the prison system and personnel to properly investigate, prevent and punish inmate-on-inmate assault. A number of the witnesses also emphasized the role overcrowding and inadequate staff resources play in sexual violence. No strategy will be effective until prison administrators and staff have the guidelines, training and resources they need to do the job. And no strategy will work unless prison personnel are fully committed to the goal of eliminating sexual violence behind bars.

“2.3 million men and women are incarcerated in the United States. The victims of sexual assault behind bars, like sexual assault victims anywhere, will deal for the rest of their lives with its devastating physical and psychological repercussions.

“Preventing prison rape must be a top priority in every detention facility in the United States. Zero tolerance is the only acceptable standard.”

The National Prison Rape Elimination Commission is charged with developing zero-tolerance national standards for enhancing the detection, prevention, reduction and punishment of sexual violence behind bars. The Commissioners are federal district judge Reggie B. Walton, who serves as Chairman; James Aiken, President of James Aiken & Associates, Inc.; Jamie Fellner, Esq., Director of the U.S. Program of Human Rights Watch; John A. Kaneb, Chairman of the Board of directors of HP Hood LLC; Pat Nolan, President of Justice Fellowship; Gustavus A. Puryear IV, Executive Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary of Corrections Corporation of America; Professor Brenda V. Smith, American University, Washington College of Law; and Dr. Cindy Struckman-Johnson, Professor of Psychology at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.

To learn more about the Commission, please visit www.nprec.us.

###