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**National Architects Group Censors Prison Critics**  
**AIA rejects slide of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo facilities**  
**in panel on ethics of prison design**

*Los Angeles, June 5, 2006*—After all the controversy surrounding the graphic pictures of prisoner abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, you would hardly expect a photo of the prison's blank exterior walls to cause much of a furor. But that's the image excluded from the "Exploring Prisons as a Design, Ethical, and Social Policy Issue" panel to be held this Thursday, June 8, at the American Institute of Architects (AIA) National Convention in Los Angeles. AIA has banned a slide with pictures of Abu Ghraib and the Guantánamo Bay prison from a presentation to be given by Raphael Sperry, President of Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility. ADPSR is a non-profit organization that focuses on social justice and environmental issues within the field of architecture.

Image credit: GlobalSecurity.com



"I'm appalled that staff members at AIA would rule out these pictures," says Sperry, an architect and member of the AIA. "The AIA's own *Code of Ethics & Professional Conduct* states that 'Members shall uphold human rights in all their professional endeavors,' so they should be concerned about the role of these infamous buildings in the abuse of human rights," Sperry continued. "Instead, they'd like to pretend that they don't exist."

After internal review AIA staff members reiterated last week that the contested slide could not be presented. A number of other slides from Sperry's presentation were rejected by AIA on the grounds that they violated rules on presenting "promotional" materials, but the Abu Ghraib slide seems to have been an exception. In a conference call with Sperry, AIA General Counsel Jay Stevens indicated that discussion of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo went beyond an "educational" presentation into the realm of "advocacy," which he claimed is prohibited.

Sperry notes that AIA permits and even encourages other types of advocacy, hosting Convention panels titled "Design Leadership and Advocacy in the Public Realm," "Leadership and Advocacy Through Design," and "Architects as Advocates." AIA's convention welcome letter states, "We'll explore the intersection of

architecture, infrastructure, and politics, drawing new, creative insights. We'll focus on how these influence 21st-century development and the demands placed on architects to engage in civic commitment." "I'm glad that AIA values the public role of architects, and I appreciate that they chose to host the prison panel," Sperry observes, "but after agreeing to it, they can't cherry-pick what we are going to say." Sperry also defends the educational content of the banned pictures. "Most architects, in fact most Americans, aren't aware that, after promising to demolish Abu Ghraib, the US is instead expanding it, as well as building even more new prisons in Iraq and Guantánamo," he says. "Human rights are a very important part of the whole conversation about prisons, and we need to talk about this at the AIA Convention."

"ADPSR has been through this censorship issue with the AIA before, in the early '80's when we were protesting nuclear proliferation during the Cold War," notes Paul Broches, FAIA, chair of ADPSR's New York chapter. "ADPSR members attempted to hold a discussion about the impact of nuclear warfare on the work of architects at the 1984 and 1985 AIA Conventions and were prevented from doing so. But in 1993 the AIA conferred its Institute Honor award on ADPSR for our work on disarmament, peace, and social justice. ADPSR continues to work for peace and social justice, as illustrated by our Prison Design Boycott campaign, and I would have hoped that AIA still supports those values too."

The majority of ADPSR's presentation describes the U.S. prison system, and was not edited by AIA. ADPSR claims that the willingness to invade, abuse, and torture people seen at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo is central to the "tough on crime" mentality that has led the U.S. to have the world's largest prison system and highest per-capita rate of incarceration. The Prison Design Boycott urges architects to design and advocate for community development projects that solve the structural problems in U.S. society that lead to crime. (More information on ADPSR's Prison Design Boycott is available at [www.adpsr.org/prisons](http://www.adpsr.org/prisons).)

The panel discussion is hosted by the AIA Academy for Architecture & Justice (AAJ), the interest group for prison, police station, and courthouse designers, who have not been party to censorship. "AAJ has been very respectful towards ADPSR's positions and has stood up for our right to present this information in the panel they invited us to," Sperry said. "I respect the prison designers who are willing to engage in a very challenging discussion about the basic facts of their work. I think that openness reflects their good intentions towards people in prison, even though I strongly disagree with building jails to put even more people inside." The panel also includes Frank J. Greene, AIA, of RicciGreene Associates, a design firm in New York City that specializes in detention facilities, and Jeanne Woodford, recently retired head of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and is moderated by Beverly J. Prior, AIA, principal of Beverly Prior Architects in San Francisco.

#### Panel Information:

Session Title: Exploring Prisons as a Design, Ethical, and Social Policy Issue  
Date: Thursday, June 8, 1:30-3 p.m.  
Location: Los Angeles Convention Center  
Room: 518  
Session ID: TH26

Access to AIA panels requires convention registration, please see <http://www.aiaconvention.com> for more information.

#### *More information about ADPSR*

*Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility is a national non-profit founded in 1983 dedicated to the involvement of architects, designers, and planners in issues of peace and social justice.*

*For more information see [www.adpsr.org/prisons](http://www.adpsr.org/prisons), or contact Raphael Sperry, Prison Campaign Director, at (415) 546-0450 or [president@adpsr.org](mailto:president@adpsr.org).*