

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Terror Inmates: Countering Violent Extremism in Prison and Beyond***

October 28, 2015 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee hearing entitled “Terror Inmates: Countering Violent Extremism in Prison and Beyond”:

“I would like to thank you for holding this hearing to examine current prison countering violent extremism programs and explore the development of such programs for inmates post-release. The United States held an estimated 1.5 million prisoners in state and federal custody at the end of 2014.

While that number was down 1% from the previous year, the United States continues to have the highest documented incarceration rate in the world. I am aware that most of today’s discussion will likely focus on the possible radicalization of Muslim inmates. However, I would encourage the Committee to remember that limiting this Committee’s oversight of radicalization to one religion ignores threats posed by violent extremists of all religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Violent gangs organized along racial and ethnic lines exist throughout U.S. prisons. The National Gang Intelligence Center has assessed that major prison gangs pose a serious domestic threat, particularly national-level prison gangs that maintain substantial influence over street gangs.”

In some cases, counting incarcerated members as well as affiliated individuals outside of correctional facilities, prison gangs can wield influence over thousands of individuals, both incarcerated and free, throughout the United States. It is clear that prison gangs often pose a security threat to prisoners and prison staff as well as the American public.

Some prison gangs delve into radical or extremist ideologies, and in a number of instances, these ideologies are integral to fashioning cohesive group identities within prison walls. Several gangs in America’s prisons subscribe to white supremacist beliefs, views broadly shared by some domestic extremist groups such as the Aryan Nation, the National Socialist Party, and the National Alliance.

For example, the Aryan Brotherhood is a particularly dangerous, national-level gang with approximately 15,000 members in and out of prison. In June of 1998, James Byrd, a partially-disabled black man, was dragged to his death by three ex-convicts, two of whom were members of the Aryan Brotherhood and the other who was seeking membership with this group.

The presence of these types of intact and operational gang organizations coupled with the ability of their leaders to control and direct operations outside of prison from within the prison walls should not be ignored. The willingness of these groups to use violence, undermine order, and commit mayhem is not dependent on religious belief or political ideology nor do these groups limit their terrorist acts to prison walls. The use of prison as a platform for collaboration between both criminal and extremist gangs and groups poses a real and present threat to our homeland.”

###

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978