To: AIA National Board of Directors

Re: proposed Ethics Code Amendment on Human Rights

Dear AIA National Directors,

Design Corps strongly endorses the proposal from Architects / Designers / Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR) to amend to the AIA Code of Ethics on the topic of human rights. Design Corps is an independent 501c3 organization whose mission is to create positive change in communities by providing architecture and planning services. Our vision is realized when people are involved in the decisions that shape their lives, including the built environment. We believe that full protection of human rights is necessary for positive change to occur in communities and for equitable decision-making to be possible.

AIA should recognize that the U.S. prison system (including the federal and state systems together) is a major obstacle to positive community development. Not only does the spending on prison construction and operations drain resources from community development needs such as schools, affordable housing, and community centers, but the day-to-day practices of the justice system have devastating impacts on the communities Design Corps aims to provide with architecture and planning services. Of the many injustices we could name, ADPSR has identified two specifically architectural practices as not only objectionable to our potential clients, but as human rights violations recognized by the United Nations.

In the spirit of support for the least among us, of respect for international human rights, and of architects being leaders in our community and our country, we call on you to implement the proposed Ethics Code Amendment restricting the use of design to violate human rights.

We endorse the following proposed amendment to the current Ethics Standard 1.4:

(proposed) Rule 1.402: Members shall not design spaces intended for execution or for torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, including prolonged solitary confinement.

Proposed Commentary:

The Convention Against Torture and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibit “torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (ICCPR Article 7) and ICCPR also requires that “all persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person” (Article 10). Prolonged solitary confinement has been identified as a form of torture by the United Nations Human Rights Council, Committee Against Torture, and the Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
Sincerely yours,

Bryan Bell, Executive Director, Associate AIA
2011 Latrobe Prize Winner
2010 National AIA Design Award in Collaborative Practice