

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AMR 51/019/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 024
6 February 2006

Embargo Date: 6 February 2006 00:01 GMT

Guantánamo: A life sentence of suffering and stigmatization

In a new report published today, Amnesty International revealed how the US detention centre at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba is condemning thousands across the world to a life of suffering, torment and stigmatization.

The report "Guantánamo: Lives torn apart – The impact of indefinite detention on detainees and their families", contains testimonies of a number of former detainees and their relatives and assesses the current state of those who continue to be imprisoned at Guantánamo, including developments in relation to the ongoing hunger strike and suicide attempts.

Five-hundred men from around 35 nationalities are detained in Guantánamo. Dozens are currently on hunger strike and there have been numerous suicide attempts. None of them have had the lawfulness of their detention reviewed in a court of law. Nine continue to be held despite no longer being defined by the US government as "enemy combatants"

"For the detainees and their family members, Guantánamo remains a harsh reality. Despite widespread international condemnation, the US authorities continue in their attempts to strip all detainees of their right to challenge their detention in US courts," said Susan Lee, Amnesty International Americas Programme Director.

"The demands of the Guantánamo hunger strikers are not controversial, they are asking for their rights under international law to be respected, they are asking to be released if they are not to be charged with internationally recognized criminal offences and they are asking that organizations such as Amnesty International be granted access to them," said Susan Lee.

According to testimonies collected by Amnesty International, some families, who know that their relatives are or have been detained by the, USA have received little or no communication from Guantánamo. Some do not know the whereabouts of their loved ones, or even if they are alive.

Amnesty International's report also reveals that the torment and stigma doesn't end in Guantánamo. For some, transfer from Guantánamo has meant nothing more than a move from one place of indefinite, unlawful detention to another. For others it has meant continual harassment, arbitrary arrest and ill-treatment. Even for those who have been returned to their home country to be reunited with their families and friends, the physical and psychological reminders of their time in Guantánamo will remain,

and the stigma of having been labelled an 'enemy combatant', and 'the worst of the worst' by President George W. Bush will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Nina Odizheva, the mother of former Russian Guantánamo detainee Ruslan Odizhev has described how the time spent in US detention had irrevocably affected her son: "It changed him...he is completely ill...he lives on pills for all his major organs...he tries not to show it or tell me details so I don't get upset...he has no appetite...he is a different person now..."

"The US administration cannot simply ignore the consequences of its actions on those detainees who have been returned home only to face more abuse, illegal detention and the stigma of having been labelled as 'the worst of the worst' by US government officials."

Amnesty International is calling on the US authorities to:

- Publish a list of all those detained by the US in Guantánamo and elsewhere;
- Try or release all Guantánamo detainees;
- Close Guantánamo and open up all US detention facilities to independent scrutiny;
- Investigate all allegations of torture and ill-treatment of detainees in US custody.

For a full copy of "Guantánamo: Lives torn apart – The impact of indefinite detention on detainees and their families", please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAMR510072006>

Cruel. Inhuman. Degrades us all. Stop torture and ill-treatment in the "war on terror". For more information on AI's campaign see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/stoptorture-index-eng>

Public Document

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