

# CRUEL AND INHUMAN

CONDITIONS IN  
GUANTÁNAMO

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Most Guantánamo detainees are housed in conditions Amnesty International believes amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment under international law. Most spend at least 22 hours a day in total isolation and suffer other forms of sensory deprivation. The majority have been held for nearly six years with no prospect of a fair trial, no direct access to their families and limited or no access to a lawyer. These conditions have had a shattering impact on the psychological and physical health of many detainees.



Above: Inside Camp 6 at Guantánamo,  
December 2006

Cover: Handcuffs attached to a wheelchair  
in Camp Delta's hospital at Guantánamo,  
January 2006

US authorities have repeatedly asserted that all Guantánamo detainees are treated humanely. They say they have access to religious items, high quality medical care, and good food and sanitation. However, many detainees spend their time confined to sealed cells with no windows to the outside or natural light or fresh air and minimal opportunity for exercise or other activities. Such conditions violate recognized minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners. This is without the devastating impact of long-term indefinite detention, coercive interrogation techniques and additional abusive treatment of some inmates.

US authorities have been promoting the “improved” situation at Guantánamo’s Camp 4, where they say detainees live communally, are offered more recreation and activities, and can spend most of the day outside. However, only a minority of Guantánamo detainees, dozens at most, are in Camp 4. Most of the 300 men are held in Camps 5, 6 and Echo, where they are confined alone with minimal contact with any other human being.

All Guantánamo detainees are denied family visits. A few have been allowed to speak to relatives on the telephone. Mail is often delayed and heavily censored. Paper and pens are usually banned from cells apart from 30 minutes a week.

Prolonged isolation can cause serious psychological and physical harm, particularly if accompanied by reduced sensory stimulation, enforced idleness and confinement to an enclosed space.

Detainees generally do not have access to independent doctors or mental health experts.

## ‘DUNGEON ABOVE THE GROUND’

US authorities describe Camp 6 as a “state of the art modern facility”. A detainee held there describes it as a “dungeon above the ground”.

Built to house 178 detainees, Camp 6 is surrounded by high concrete walls. Inside, detainees are confined for at least 22 hours a day in individual steel cells with no outside windows. Contrary to international standards, the cells have

no access to natural light or air and have fluorescent lighting on around the clock.

The cells and conditions in Camp 5 are similar, with social activity and recreation severely restricted and minimal contact with other people.

Some of the harshest conditions appear to be in Camp Echo – a collection of cells in windowless huts in which detainees spend 23 or 24 hours a day. Some detainees have reportedly been denied outdoor exercise for weeks at a time. The International Committee for the Red Cross has described the conditions there as “extremely harsh”.

Some detainees have complained that the guards, including female guards, watch them when they are using the toilet or showering. This can amount to a form of sexual abuse.

Detainees in Camps 5, 6 and Echo are not allowed newspapers, radio or TV.

## PEACEFUL PROTEST

*“We [the hunger strikers] ask only for justice: treat us, as promised, under the rules of the Geneva Conventions... while we are held, and either try us fairly for a valid criminal charge or set us free.”*

Binyam Mohammed al-Habashi

Detainees have staged a series of hunger strikes to protest against their confinement and conditions of detention. Some have been forcibly fed through nasal-gastric tubes, a method that may amount to torture or other ill-treatment. Detainees have apparently been strapped into restraint chairs and forcibly fed through a thick plastic tube with a metal edge. Detainees have described being subjected to considerable pain in the process. Their lawyers say they were put in isolation in cold rooms, and that some were beaten to punish them for joining the hunger strike.



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*Al-Jazeera* journalist and Guantánamo detainee Sami al-Hajj, who is currently on hunger strike, has said the reasons for the protest included continued persecution based on their religion, the isolation and the denial of a fair trial. His lawyers are extremely concerned about his physical and psychological health.

A Guantánamo detainee closing a door, October 2007.

## LOSS OF PRIVILEGES

Detainees can be punished by “loss of privileges” for real or perceived minor infringements of the rules, even those held in the mental health unit.

Shortly before his release, Jumah al-Dossari told his lawyer that Abdul, an Algerian detainee who has a serious brain injury, had at one point walked around his cell for three days without stopping or eating, then froze as if in a spasm. He said that Abdul was punished by having his comfort items removed, even though he could not understand the rules.

“THESE CONDITIONS HAVE LED IN SOME INSTANCES TO SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS, OVER 350 ACTS OF SELF-HARM IN 2003 ALONE, INDIVIDUAL AND MASS SUICIDE ATTEMPTS AND WIDESPREAD, PROLONGED HUNGER STRIKES.

Report of five UN experts on Guantánamo, 2006

# “MY CELL IS LIKE A GRAVE” ... HE TELLS ME HOW EVERYTHING ECHOES OFF THOSE STEEL CELL WALLS.

Lawyer for Ahmed Belbacha, an Algerian national and UK resident still held in Camp 6, despite being cleared for release

In January 2007 Abdul Hamid al-Ghizzawi broke the rule banning detainees from carrying anything in their pockets when they go to the showers: he had put some toilet paper in his pocket. He lost all his privileges, including his thermal shirt, even though he is ill with hepatitis B and tuberculosis.

## SUICIDES: A GOOD PR MOVE?

*“His despair was great enough and... he went and killed himself... A stench of despair hangs over Guantánamo.”*

Mani al-Utaybi's lawyer

Fears about the psychological health of Guantánamo detainees were heightened by the deaths of three

men after apparent suicides in 2006 and dozens of other reported suicide attempts.

Mani al-Utaybi died along with two others in June 2006. He apparently did not know that he had been cleared for transfer or release from Guantánamo. All three men had been held in maximum security custody in Camp 1, at that time confined to small cells with little exercise and few amenities.

A US official described the apparent suicides as “a good PR move” and “a tactic to further the jihadi cause”.

Another man died after an apparent suicide in Camp 5 in May 2007.

## ACT NOW

Call on the US authorities to:

- end immediately prolonged solitary confinement and reduced sensory stimulation for detainees in Guantánamo;
- allow all detainees more human interaction, activities and recreation;
- allow independent healthcare professionals into Guantánamo to examine detainees in private;
- allow regular contact with detainees' families through mail, phone calls and visits.

### WRITE TO:

Rear Admiral Mark H Buzby  
Commander Joint Task Force Guantánamo  
Department of Defense  
Joint Task Force Guantánamo  
Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, APO AAE 09360  
Fax: +1 305 437 1241  
Salutation: Dear Rear Admiral

December 2007  
AI Index: AMR 51/169/2007

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