

EMBARGO: Monday 11 January at 00:01hs GMT

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European states must take concrete steps to help close Guantánamo – Case Studies

The following profiles tell the stories of two men, stranded in Guantánamo, in need of a home. The profiles have been provided by CCR and Reprive. For further information about these, and other prisoners, visit their lawyers' websites – www.reprive.org.uk, www.ccrjustice.org.



Ahmed Belbacha – between a rock and a hard place

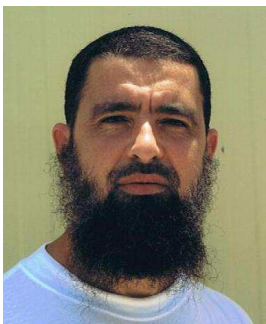
Ahmed Belbacha is a 40 year old trained accountant represented by Reprive. He worked for many years for the Algerian state oil company in its commercial division. After being recalled from this position to complete his military service Ahmed later received multiple death threats from the Groupe Islamiste Armé (GIA), an organisation known for violence against both soldiers and government employees.

In 1997, intensifying threats drove Ahmed to seek asylum in the UK.

Whilst waiting for his application to be processed, he worked in different service industries, including a job at the Swallow Royal Hotel; he was in charge of cleaning the UK Deputy Prime Minister's room during a national Labour Party conference. He received a personal note of thanks.

Unfortunately his asylum application was later refused and Ahmed decided to travel to Pakistan to take advantage of the free education programmes and to study the Koran. He intended to return within six months to pursue his asylum claim. Unfortunately, the tragic events of 9/11 intervened and following the invasion of Afghanistan Ahmed was seized by villagers who were lured by the US bounties on 'foreign heads' and handed over to the Pakistani military. After holding Ahmed in a border prison for a day, they sold Ahmed to US forces. Thus began a dark period that lasted many months, spanned several prisons and ended with Ahmed's transfer to Guantánamo from Kandahar in February 2002. To this day Ahmed struggles to recount the details of the brutality he went through in Kandahar.

Ahmed has now been imprisoned for almost eight years in Guantánamo. Much of that time has passed in Camp 6 – that is, in a small, windowless steel cell, artificially lit 24 hours a day. Ahmed has been cleared for release for three years but is fearful of returning to Algeria where he faces potential threats from both the GIA and the government. He awaits the humanitarian protection of a European nation.



Djamel Ameziane

Mr. Ameziane is a college-educated citizen of Algeria. An ethnic Berber, Mr. Ameziane fled his home country more than 15 years ago in order to escape escalating violence and insecurity, and in search of a better life. He travelled first to Austria, where he worked as a high-paid chef in an Italian restaurant, and then to Canada, where he sought political asylum and lived for five years but was ultimately denied refuge. Fearful of being deported to Algeria, and faced with

few options, Mr. Ameziane went to Afghanistan. He traveled to Afghanistan because it was the only country he could think of where, as a Muslim man, he might live peacefully and without constant fear of being returned to Algeria. He fled that country soon after the fighting began in October 2001, but was captured by a local Pakistani tribe. The tribe turned him over to Pakistani authorities, who apparently sold him to the U.S. military for a bounty, as was practice at the time. The Americans transported Mr. Ameziane first to the airbase at Kandahar, Afghanistan, and then to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, on or about February 11, 2002.

As one of the first prisoners to arrive at Guantánamo, Mr. Ameziane was held in the now-infamous metal cages of Camp X-Ray. Starting in 2006, he was held for more than a year in solitary confinement in a small windowless cell in Camp 6. In addition to the inhumane conditions of his detention, he has been subjected repeatedly to brutal acts of physical violence by military guards. Thankfully, Mr. Ameziane has been moved to Camp 4, a communal prison facility reserved for the “most compliant” detainees without disciplinary problems. Mr. Ameziane can now take advantage of limited opportunities to exercise, improve his considerable language skills, and learn to draw. His health has also been restored steadily.

Mr. Ameziane has never been alleged by the U.S. government to have engaged in any acts of terrorism. He has also consistently denied that he ever engaged in any acts of terrorism, or ever picked up a weapon or participated in any military training or fighting. In sum, he has never had any involvement with extremism, terrorism or any act of violence whatsoever. Nonetheless, he is now approaching his ninth year of imprisonment without charge or a judicial determination of the legality of his detention in Guantánamo.

Mr. Ameziane remains trapped at Guantánamo until a third country offers him safe resettlement. After he is released, Mr. Ameziane hopes to get married and start a family of his own; to work and live a quiet life in freedom; and to begin the process of rebuilding and enjoying his life after Guantánamo.

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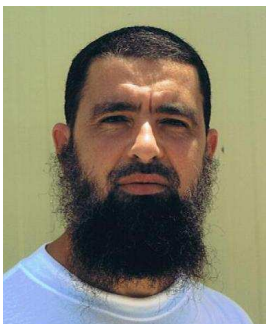
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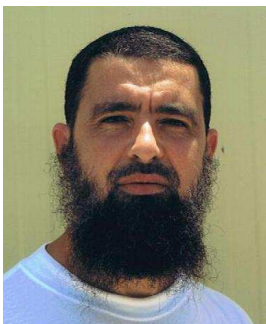
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