OMNI GUANTANAMO NEWSLETTER #5, May 3, 2013.
Compiled by Dick Bennett, for a Culture of Peace. Guantanamo: A Disaster from the War on Terror and the US Culture of War. (#1 March 3, 2011; #2 Dec. 11, 2011; #3 January 21, 2012; #4 Jan. 16, 2013)

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JUNE IS TORTURE AWARENESS MONTH. MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR JUNE 22 in Fayetteville, DAY OF PROTEST AGAINST US TORTURE (the Saturday nearest to June 26, UN International Torture Victims DAY). Watch for later announcements.

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Kurnaz, Gitmo Survivor After 5 Years

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Witness Against Torture and Catholic Worker: January 11, 2012

Witness Against Torture and War Resisters League

In Addition to Gitmo: US Terrorism Prison Complex

Greenwald Book on Bush/Obama

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May Day! May Day! May Day!

CODEPINK [info@codepink.org]

To:  
James R. Bennett

May 1, 2013

Dear Dick,

Join the urgent call to save the lives of 130 prisoners on a hunger strike in Guantanamo starting today, May Day! Sign our pledge to join the global hunger strike and actions for justice for Guantanamo prisoners by fasting for at least 24 hours.

Today, 130 of the 166 detainees in Guantanamo are engaged in a hunger strike that started in February. Even though President Obama promised to shut down Guantanamo when he ran for president and continues to say he wants to close the prison, his failure to do so has prompted us to take further action by organizing a global hunger strike. Join us by signing the pledge now!

All over the world, people are outraged by the indefinite detention of prisoners at Guantanamo and their cruel and degrading treatment. Join the fast with high-profile global figures such as Wikileaks founder Julian Assange and CODEPINK cofounder Diane Wilson. Send us a picture of yourself with a message you would like to share with the world and we will post it in our growing Flickr set.

Send us your solidarity photos!

Join the Global Hunger Strike: Take the Pledge Now!

Tweet this at President Obama!

Send it on Twitter!

Share on Facebook!
After 11 years protesting in orange jumpsuits at the White House, in Congress, at the State Department and even making a trip to Guantanamo, we realize it is time to make this bigger than ever. *Join us, wherever you are, today!* 

*Onward toward justice for all,*
Alli, Candice, Dooler, Jodie, Medea, Nancy, Noor, Rooj, Tighe

P.S. *Tweet this:* Hey @BarackObama, keep your promise: Close Guantanamo! #CloseGitmo @WhiteHouse #Fast4Gitmo

P.P.S. *Join CODEPINK in Fort Meade,* Maryland on June 1st as Bradley Manning’s trial

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**Here is the link to all OMNI newsletters:**
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

Full knowledge and evaluation of the crimes committed against prisoners and of other abuses by people in power empower the People to end Guantanamo. Why are The People not outraged over these gross injustices?

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**Gitmo Is Killing Me** By **SAMIR NAJII al HASAN MOQBEL**

Published: April 14, 2013 354 Comments
GUANTÁNAMO BAY, Cuba

ONE man here weighs just 77 pounds. Another, 98. Last thing I knew, I weighed 132, but that was a month ago.

I’ve been on a hunger strike since Feb. 10 and have lost well over 30 pounds. I will not eat until they restore my dignity.

I’ve been detained at Guantánamo for 11 years and three months. I have never been charged with any crime. I have never received a trial.

I could have been home years ago — no one seriously thinks I am a threat — but still I am here. Years ago the military said I was a “guard” for Osama bin Laden, but this was nonsense, like something out of the American movies I used to watch. They don’t even seem to believe it anymore. But they don’t seem to care how long I sit here, either.
When I was at home in Yemen, in 2000, a childhood friend told me that in Afghanistan I could do better than the $50 a month I earned in a factory, and support my family. I’d never really traveled, and knew nothing about Afghanistan, but I gave it a try.

I was wrong to trust him. There was no work. I wanted to leave, but had no money to fly home. After the American invasion in 2001, I fled to Pakistan like everyone else. The Pakistanis arrested me when I asked to see someone from the Yemeni Embassy. I was then sent to Kandahar, and put on the first plane to Gitmo.

Last month, on March 15, I was sick in the prison hospital and refused to be fed. A team from the E.R.F. (Extreme Reaction Force), a squad of eight military police officers in riot gear, burst in. They tied my hands and feet to the bed. They forcibly inserted an IV into my hand. I spent 26 hours in this state, tied to the bed. During this time I was not permitted to go to the toilet. They inserted a catheter, which was painful, degrading and unnecessary. I was not even permitted to pray.

I will never forget the first time they passed the feeding tube up my nose. I can’t describe how painful it is to be force-fed this way. As it was thrust in, it made me feel like throwing up. I wanted to vomit, but I couldn’t. There was agony in my chest, throat and stomach. I had never experienced such pain before. I would not wish this cruel punishment upon anyone.

I am still being force-fed. Two times a day they tie me to a chair in my cell. My arms, legs and head are strapped down. I never know when they will come. Sometimes they come during the night, as late as 11 p.m., when I’m sleeping.

There are so many of us on hunger strike now that there aren’t enough qualified medical staff members to carry out the force-feedings; nothing is happening at regular intervals. They are feeding people around the clock just to keep up.

During one force-feeding the nurse pushed the tube about 18 inches into my stomach, hurting me more than usual, because she was doing things so hastily. I called the interpreter to ask the doctor if the procedure was being done correctly or not.

It was so painful that I begged them to stop feeding me. The nurse refused to stop feeding me. As they were finishing, some of the “food” spilled on my clothes. I asked them to change my clothes, but the guard refused to allow me to hold on to this last shred of my dignity.

When they come to force me into the chair, if I refuse to be tied up, they call the E.R.F. team. So I have a choice. Either I can exercise my right to protest my detention, and be beaten up, or I can submit to painful force-feeding.

The only reason I am still here is that President Obama refuses to send any detainees back to Yemen. This makes no sense. I am a human being, not a passport, and I deserve to be treated like one.
I do not want to die here, but until President Obama and Yemen’s president do something, that is what I risk every day.

Where is my government? I will submit to any “security measures” they want in order to go home, even though they are totally unnecessary.

I will agree to whatever it takes in order to be free. I am now 35. All I want is to see my family again and to start a family of my own.

The situation is desperate now. All of the detainees here are suffering deeply. At least 40 people here are on a hunger strike. People are fainting with exhaustion every day. I have vomited blood.

And there is no end in sight to our imprisonment. Denying ourselves food and risking death every day is the choice we have made.

I just hope that because of the pain we are suffering, the eyes of the world will once again look to Guantánamo before it is too late.

*Samir Naji al Hasan Moqbel, a prisoner at Guantánamo Bay since 2002, told this story, through an Arabic interpreter, to his lawyers at the legal charity Reprieve in an unclassified telephone call.*

A version of this op-ed appeared in print on April 15, 2013, on page A19 of the New York edition with the headline: Gitmo Is Killing Me.
New York

After more than 4 years in office, this is now Obama's Gulag. But since Bush and Cheney are long gone from office, all of those progressives who said we should close Gitmo no longer care.

April 15, 2013 at 11:46 a.m.

Wisconsin

I think people should look back to the time when Obama accepted the Nobel Peace Prize. A lot of us were thinking, "For what?"

My take at the time was that Obama should have declined. He should have had the humility to realize he didn't deserve it, and he would have to do much more before he could deserve it. I believe the Nobel committee intended the prize as Obama accepted it, as a call to live up to. He hasn't.

I'm often very hard on people who show hypocrisy, because I think it is one of the fundamental human flaws that people have a hard time seeing in themselves. This is one area where we cannot allow those leaders who claim to be above it to get away with it.

Guantánamo Witnesses Speak By David Giffey

Witness to Guantánamo Project
witnesstoguantanamo.com
Years of challenges to the offshore torture facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, have failed to overcome U.S. government intransigence, and no shutdown of the detention camp as promised by President Barack Obama appears likely. Established in 2002 by the administration of George W. Bush and maintained under Obama, Guantánamo’s sordid record includes the seizure and detention of 779 men, internment of children, six known detainee suicides, 23 attempted suicides, and documented use of torture, leading Amnesty International to label the place “a human rights scandal.”

New work undertaken by the Witness to Guantánamo (W2G) Project relies on oral history to preserve the stories, if not the lives, of Guantánamo detainees. Oral history is the original and probably most reliable form of record keeping. Its primary method is to collect the testimonies of people who actually witnessed events firsthand.

Leading W2G is Peter Jan Honigsberg, a professor at the University of San Francisco School of Law. Honigsberg began regularly teaching a course on the War on Terror in 2002. He visited Guantánamo in 2007 and is the author of Our Nation Unhinged: The Human Consequences of the War on Terror (University of California Press, 2009).

The project aims to document human rights abuses and rule of law violations with an archive “to educate the public and mobilize pressure to hold U.S. government officials and private actors accountable.” According to its website, W2G has interviewed 97 people in 14 countries. The in-depth, filmed interviews with former detainees, prison guards, chaplains, medical personnel, prosecutors, habeas attorneys, high-level government and military officials, FBI agents, interrogators, interpreters, and detainees’ family members will be available in English and transcribed “to reach the broadest audience possible.”

Already available on the website are brief video clips and transcriptions, as
indications of what will come from this ambitious and courageous project. W2G’s artistic director and cinematographer is Johnny Symons, who won awards for documentaries about “don’t ask, don’t tell” and reconciliation in South Africa. Symons teaches documentary filmmaking at Stanford University and the Art Institute of California-San Francisco.

The project is partnered with Amnesty International, and its avowed goals include: “to support qualitative and quantitative social science research; select footage for documentary and other media-related projects; create educational units on Guantánamo for elementary through graduate school students; and inform and educate the public. The diverse potential uses of the archive will be limited only by the imagination.”

The spoken word is a treasury of human activity. Oral traditions preceded literature. By the fifth century BC, Herodotus was said to rely on oral accounts for his historical writings.

Oral histories in the modern era flourished anew after World War II, and the methodology used by W2G credits director Stephen Spielberg for his filmed accounts of Holocaust survivors. It is a cousin of journalism, in the best of circumstances. Historians, like journalists, are expected to develop good ears; listening is their best tool.

As a journalist with a penchant for oral history projects, I worked to produce three publications using oral histories. The subjects were migrant farm worker labor organizing; African Americans in Madison, Wisconsin; and war veterans who became peace activists.

Those projects taught me, firstly, that oral history is labor-intensive to an extreme. It is also demanding creatively and psychologically. Sitting for hours with a tape recorder across a table from someone demands that an interpersonal relationship be established.

While working on oral history projects, I was fortunate to meet Howard Zinn. We lived far apart, so most of our communications were written, his often ending with: “In defiance of the madness, Howard.” I named my collection of edited oral histories with 20 elders of the African American community The People’s Stories of South Madison. The title was an unabashed reference to Zinn’s epic A People’s History of the United States.

Zinn was steadfast in his struggle for truth and justice. His constant reminder to act “in defiance of the madness” under-pins the Witness to Guantánamo Project. The U.S. government scorning international law, violating human rights, and torturing people in the secret chambers of Guantánamo is the “madness” being documented by W2G. As W2G develops the oral histories, first-hand detainee accounts will shine a light into a dark corner of U.S. policy.
Wisconsin journalist David Giffey is a contributing editor with fightingbob.com. His publications include Long Shadows: Veterans’ Paths to Peace (Atwood Publishing, Madison, Wisconsin).


Why Guantánamo might outlast the Obama presidency

Barack Obama began his presidency in courageous fashion. In his inaugural address, he boldly proclaimed, “We reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals.” Then, on just his second day in office, he backed up his signature campaign promise by signing an executive order to close the Guantánamo prison within one year.

The administration of George W. Bush had a different approach to fighting terrorism. Just five days after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Vice President Dick Cheney appeared on NBC’s Meet the Press and said the United States would need to work “the dark side” in its counterterrorism effort. “It’s going to be vital for us to use any means at our disposal, basically, to achieve our objective,” he explained.

Not only did these “means” include torture (called “enhanced interrogation” by its supporters),
but the Bush administration also imprisoned men suspected of terrorism in an offshore location allegedly outside the jurisdiction of United States courts—or any law, for that matter. Mostly from 2002 to 2004, the United States transferred nearly 800 Muslim men to the U.S. Naval Base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, for indefinite detention without charges or trials.

In January 2009 the newly elected president, Barack Obama, sought to change course. As a first step to shuttering the prison, Greg Craig, the top White House lawyer, drew up a plan to release a few Uighur detainees, long cleared of wrongdoing, onto U.S. soil. Mr. Craig announced the plan at a national security meeting on April 17, 2009. Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton were on board. “It was a matter of days, not weeks,” until the transfer would take place, a top Defense official told Time magazine. When the move proved successful, the administration hoped that other countries would be more willing to help resettle Guantánamo detainees.

Within a month the plan collapsed.

Four years later, Guantánamo remains open for business, indefinite detention continues and detainees are prosecuted in military commissions, not federal courts. Now it is not clear whether the prison will ever close—at least until the last prisoner grows old and dies. What caused such a dramatic reversal?

**Growing Opposition**

In “The Fall of Greg Craig, Obama’s Top Lawyer” (11/19/2009), Time magazine provides an account of what unfolded inside the White House during those first weeks of the Obama administration as they grappled with closing Guantánamo.

Just one day before Mr. Craig pitched his plan to the national security team, President Obama publicly released a series of memos from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency that detailed the “enhanced interrogation” techniques used by the Bush administration. Michael Hayden, former C.I.A. director, had organized internal opposition to releasing the memos, but Mr. Obama did it anyway—consistent with his promise of greater transparency as well as taking the moral high road in the fight against terrorism.

Meanwhile Mr. Craig’s plan of releasing the Uighurs onto U.S. soil became public, and Republican leaders unleashed three weeks of relentless attacks against President Obama’s
early foreign policy decisions. They claimed that Mr. Obama had emboldened America’s enemies by releasing the memos, and now he would endanger Americans by transferring prisoners into the United States—for release, further detention or trial.

Suddenly it was becoming too costly, politically, to take the moral high road. Time reported that, in late April, “Democratic pollsters charted a disturbing trend: a drop in Obama’s support among independents, driven in part by national-security issues.” Inside the White House, the early optimism and momentum faded. The administration was also concerned that the fight to close Guantánamo might distract from domestic priorities like health care and strengthening the economy.

In early May, Mr. Obama decided against releasing the Uighur detainees into the United States. “It was a political decision, to put it bluntly,” an aide told Time. Two weeks later, President Obama sought to address growing public discontent with a major speech on national security. In the speech, he not only announced that he would work with Congress to revamp the Bush-era military commissions, but he also embraced the use of indefinite detention without charges or trials for a group of detainees “who cannot be prosecuted yet who pose a clear danger to the American people.”

**America’s Prison Problem**

There are many plausible explanations for why President Obama failed to close the prison in his first term. He did not push hard enough. Conservative leaders successfully played on Americans’ fears. The administration was not prepared—or willing—to respond to the political attacks. Then the Congress, in bipartisan fashion, refused to allocate funds for closing the prison (and still continues to place restrictions on transferring detainees out of Guantánamo). Americans, collectively, are also responsible. If it had been politically popular for Mr. Obama to follow through on his promise to close Guantánamo, he would have.

But there is more to the story. If one looks a little deeper, it becomes clear that Guantánamo is merely a symptom of America’s larger problem with incarceration. Even of those Americans who actually want Guantánamo closed, most believe it is an aberration from the norm, a somewhat unprecedented and isolated stain on America’s reputation as a moral leader in the world. In reality, Guantánamo is consonant with America’s dismal record of incarceration of its own citizens.

At present, the United States incarcerates about 2.3 million men, women and children—a
higher percentage of its citizens than any country in the world. Many are serving time for nonviolent crimes like drug offenses. Some states have enacted “three strikes” laws. In juvenile detention centers, children are sometimes punished by being confined to their cells for 23 hours a day. The death penalty is still legal in 33 of 50 states and in federal and military court. Confronted with overcrowding and limited budgets, many states have turned over their prisons to private corporations that turn a profit by keeping the beds full (see Editorial, 1/7).

If Americans are willing to live with such cruel practices at home, then it is not surprising that there is indifference toward or outright support for the continuing existence of Guantánamo. Why would Americans care about the human rights of a few hundred accused terrorists, especially when the detainees are consistently portrayed (often wrongly) as intent on killing Americans? Americans prefer to focus on the economy or health care (or the Super Bowl), and the Obama administration follows suit.

**Guantánamo Today**

Early in his presidency, Mr. Obama made some progress in transferring prisoners out of Guantánamo, but this came to a halt because Congress restricted funding for such transfers. In the past two years, only four men have departed Guantánamo: Two Uighurs were resettled in El Salvador; Omar Khadr, detained since he was 15, was transferred to Canada to serve out a sentence; and Adnan Latif, a Yemeni, left in a coffin, having died from an overdose of psychiatric medication. (See Editorial, 10/22).

This leaves 166 men in Guantánamo. The vast majority of these detainees, 132, will not be charged: Eighty-six are approved for transfer or release, and 46 are being held indefinitely. The military is currently prosecuting seven detainees before military commissions and plans to prosecute 24 others. Three detainees are serving sentences.

Shortly before his reelection, Mr. Obama reiterated his intention to close Guantánamo. If he is serious about fulfilling this promise, he must act on two levels:

*End the detention of those approved for transfer.* Mr. Obama already missed his first opportunity to make substantial progress on closing Guantánamo when he—despite an earlier veto threat—once again signed the National Defense Authorization Act, which includes onerous restrictions on detainee transfers. Under the current law, it has become nearly impossible to transfer men out of Guantánamo, even those who have been cleared of wrongdoing for years. Now, to regain momentum, Mr. Obama should immediately lift the moratorium on detainee
transfers to Yemen. The Yemeni men who have been long cleared for transfer or release should begin going home. It is shamefully unjust to continue holding these detainees, not for what they have done, but because of their nationality.

End the so-called “war on terror.” The conventional path for closing Guantánamo is to transfer the remaining prisoners to the United States for prosecution or continued detention under the laws of war. This is a false path. Simply transferring the prisoners to an alternative location fails to address the major human rights concern with detentions at Guantánamo: indefinite detention without charges or trials. Mr. Obama has continued this Bush-era approach to fighting terrorism. It is the wrong approach. Anyone suspected of terrorism should be charged and tried in federal courts under the U.S. Constitution, not in extralegal systems without meaningful due process. Unfortunately both Congress and the Supreme Court support the current system.

Guantánamo will not close and the use of indefinite detention will not end until the U.S. brings the “war on terror” to a juridical close. Such an action would effectively undercut the (claimed) legal justification for wartime detention of enemy fighters until the “cessation of active hostilities.” While the idea of ending the “war on terror” might appear farfetched, it has recently gained currency thanks to a major speech by Jeh Johnson, outgoing general counsel for the Defense Department, at the Oxford Union in November 2012.

In the speech Mr. Johnson warned, “In its 12th year, we must not accept the current conflict, and all that it entails, as the ‘new normal.’” In evaluating various dimensions of the current conflict, he argued, “on the present course, there will come a tipping point” when “we must be able to say to ourselves that our efforts should no longer be considered an ‘armed conflict’ against al Qaeda and its associated forces.”

“‘War,’” Mr. Johnson explained, “must be regarded as a finite, extraordinary and unnatural state of affairs. …Peace must be regarded as the norm toward which the human race continually strives.”

So far, the Obama administration has made good on its public commitment to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan “at a steady pace.” In 2014, according to the administration’s plan, Afghan forces will assume full security responsibility for the country. But the broader “war on terror” is another matter. Mr. Obama is responsible for executing drone strikes at
unprecedented rates and dangerously treating the entire world as a battlefield for U.S. military strikes. Mr. Obama’s global war has expanded beyond Afghanistan and into countries like Pakistan and Yemen.

There is a lot at stake in Mr. Obama’s second term. When he leaves office in four years, which of Mr. Bush’s policy failures will remain in place? If the war on terror continues and Guantánamo remains open, it is likely that the war and the prison will be permanent elements of American foreign policy, and Americans will share responsibility for this. In the next four years, which course will Americans push Mr. Obama to follow?

Luke Hansen, S.J., is an associate editor at America. This article, updated from the original, was first published in Italian in the January 2013 issue of Popoli magazine.


AMY NEE WALKER, “GUANTANAMO: YEAR TWELVE,” THE CATHOLIC WORKER (March-April 2013). Walker reports on the work by Witness Against Torture (WAT), their fasts and public demonstrations in D.C. dressed in orange jump suits and black hoods, and specifically their Jan. 2013 action. They hold steadfast to “Shut down Guantanamo.” [I read this in CW’s magazine, but I could not find it online at the time of publication.—Dick]

MORE BY OR ABOUT AMY NEE WALKER
1. Fast for Justice 2013: Day 1 | News | Witness Against Torture
witnesstorture.org/blog/2013/01/07/fast-for-justice-2013-day-1/

Jan 7, 2013 – 1) DAY 1 – Opening Circle Reflections (Compiled by Amy Nee) 2) Maryhouse ... Friday Night Meeting Recap, by Ted Walker. This past Friday ... We titled the meeting “Guantánamo—Year Twelve Begins.” Unfortunately, we did ...

2. The State of Guantánamo | News | Witness Against Torture
witnesstorture.org/blog/2012/01/25/the-state-of-guantanamo/

Jan 25, 2012 – Amy Nee and Ted Walker for Witness Against Torture ... Days before the
10th year anniversary of Guantánamo, close to fifty people gather to form a community in the basement of ... White House Witness (WAT Jan 12, 2012) ...

Frank Rich | Obama Needs to Make Up for His Gitmo Failure

Richard writes: "As far as Guantánamo goes, Obama can ignore the neo-con dead-enders of the McCain-Graham school and start using the executive powers he has weirdly neglected so far; he can lobby Congress on the rest. He's in a race against time, and staying pat, or settling for the noble rhetoric he provided yesterday, are not options."

READ MORE  http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/391-guantanamo-bay/17231-obama-needs-to-make-up-for-his-gitmo-failure

END GUANTANAMO NEWSLETTER #5

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