

Center for Constitutional Rights

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://ccrjustice.org/home/press-center/press-releases/mentally-ill-torture-survivor-imprisoned-guant-namo-2002-sent-home>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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March 7, 2022, New York Mohammed al-Qahtani, held at Guantanamo since 2002, arrived in Saudi Arabia today, where he will receive psychiatric care for schizophrenia that was exacerbated by systematic torture by the U.S. government.

Mr. al-Qahtani, who is in his forties, was diagnosed with schizophrenia long before he was rendered to Guantanamo where he was tortured and held for 20 years. Although U.S. government officials knew he suffered from mental illness, they subjected him to a program of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.

Mohammed has always belonged in the care of psychiatrists, not in a prison. He survived being tortured and detained at Guantanamo through enormous personal courage, and we are very hopeful that with proper treatment with his family nearby, he will learn to manage his symptoms and salvage the remainder of his life, said [Shayana Kadidal](#), Senior Managing Attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights.

The U.S. government dropped all charges against Mr. al-Qahtani in 2008 but continued to imprison him, denying him due process. Cleared for repatriation last month, he was released into the custody of the Saudi government and should soon be able to see his family, who are eager to help him secure the treatment he needs.

It would not be right to say that justice was done with Mohammeds repatriation because nothing can make up for the torture of a sick man and his incarceration without trial over two decades. For Mohammed, this is about survival. The end of his long nightmare at Guantanamo means that he finally has a chance to receive the medical attention he desperately needs in Saudi Arabia, with the support of his loving family, said Professor Ramzi Kassem, of the CLEAR Clinic at CUNY Law School.

After suffering a traumatic brain injury in a car accident at age 8, he developed schizophrenic hallucinations as a teenager. Saudi police pulled him from a garbage dumpster he had thrown himself into; later, he was arrested after jumping into traffic and was involuntarily confined to a psychiatric hospital where he was formally diagnosed with schizophrenia.

In 2015, an independent psychiatric expert examined Mr. al-Qahtani and confirmed the diagnosis, and the militarys own doctors unanimously came to agree with it. During his very first months at the prison, the FBI had observed him talking to non-existent people, hiding from them under a sheet, and hearing voices.

Yet at the direction of then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the U.S. government subjected him to a program of torture, detailed in [logs leaked](#) to Time magazine in 2005. The regimen included prolonged solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, physical violence, and sexual humiliation, along with other forms of psychological torture. Mr. al-Qahtani is the only person the U.S. government has [publicly admitted](#) to torturing.

The abuse left him with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and intensified the hallucinations, suicidal thoughts, and depressive episodes caused by his pre-existing mental illness. In recent years, the voices in his head have increasingly told him to harm himself, for example, swallowing broken glassmaking his transfer urgent, his lawyers say.

The doctor who examined Mr. al-Qahtani in 2015 found that, given the abuse he endured and his related mistrust of U.S. government doctors, it would be impossible for him to receive adequate care at Guantanamo. In Saudi Arabia, supported by family and working with trusted doctors who speak Arabic, his family is hopeful that he may finally receive the treatment he needs.

Mr. al-Qahtani is represented by [Shayana Kadidal](#) and [Luna Martinez](#) at the Center for Constitutional Rights; Professor Ramzi Kassem and students in the CLEAR Clinic at CUNY School of Law; Professor Sandra Babcock at the Cornell Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide; and Larry Lustberg of Gibbons P.C.

The Biden administration has now transferred three men from Guantanamo. From a total of 780 men, 38 remain; 27 have not been charged, and 18 have been cleared for transfer. The Center for Constitutional Rights, which was the first organization to file a case on behalf of men imprisoned at Guantanamo, still has four clients there: [Sufyan Barhoumi](#), [Sharqawi Al Haji](#), [Guled Hassan Duran](#), and [Majid Khan](#).

The [CLEAR](#) clinic (Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility) is based out of Main Street Legal Services, Inc., the clinical arm of CUNY School of Law. CLEARs mandate is to serve Muslim and all other clients, communities, and movements in the New York City area and beyond that are targeted by local, state, or federal government agencies under the guise of national security and counterterrorism.

The Center for Constitutional Rights works with communities under threat to fight for justice and liberation through litigation, advocacy, and strategic communications. Since 1966, the Center for Constitutional Rights has taken on oppressive systems of power, including structural racism, gender oppression, economic inequity, and governmental overreach. Learn more at ccrjustice.org.

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