

Witness Against Torture

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

<https://witnessagainsttorture.com/2014/01/07/fast-for-justice-2014-day-2/>

Campaign and Advocacy

We save our lengthy posts for this site. If you want quicker, more frequent updates about our actions, along with photos and videos, please head over to our [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) pages.

Dear Friends,

We have been fasting in solidarity with the Guantanamo detainees for 36 hours now. The group has gotten a handle on what victuals it wants to have on-hand. This morning, the sustenance team gathered feedback and requests and procured a round of juice, vegetable and nut drinks, as well as honey, salt, cayenne and a few other items.

In an alcove of the basement space were using here at St. Stephens Epesopal Church can be found a partial kitchenette sink and refrigerator and two folding tables we've set up, across which the drinks, mugs, hand-sanitizer and other items are set out.

We wonder what the detainees version of our folding table and the contact we have around it is. In our morning group, we discussed, among other things, the possibility that the government could move them into an American prison. Here at least they would have access to American doctors, courts and visitation rights, among other things. Despite all they have been and continue to be subjected to at Guantanamo, prisoners have expressed a preference to remain there over this option. Yes: escaping from the desert prison encampment, we hear the refrain, faint though steady, United we have hope.

May the unity we have begun to experience in St. Stephens basement and on the streets of DC a unity inspired by the nearly unfathomable hope of men forgotten nearly by all of humanity touch all who wish to participate in the movement we have attached ourselves to.

That movement is to close Guantanamo Bay Naval Prison forever and end all forms of torture.

We hope you enjoy today's update. In this daily update you will find:

1. An update on the situation in Guantanamo
2. A response to a letter from Senator Dianne Feinstein
3. A Close Guantanamo billboard from [CloseGitmo.net](#)
4. A list of local vigils
5. A profile of a detainee, Fawzi al-Odah and WAT member Palina Prasasouk

By Palina Prasasouk

Here we are in Washington, DC again on the 12th anniversary of Guantanamo. How we got here:

When we left DC in January 2013, we were in the mind-frame that Guantanamo would not be closing anytime soon with 0 releases from the prison in the previous year, excluding the death of [Adnan Latif](#) and the transfer of [Omar Khadr](#) to another prison in Canada.

Then, the game changed when military guards raided prison cells in February 2013, throwing the belongings of prisoners Qurans, legal papers and letters from their families. A new hunger strike grew, which has now become the largest and longest running protest inside the prison. Government officials denied any such knowledge of a hunger strike. It was only known after Shaker Aamer reported to his attorneys that nearly all the men in GTMO were on a hunger strike.

The strike peaked in [June](#) at 106 men on hunger strike and 45 being force-fed. What has been forgotten on the minds of Americans where most had assumed Guantanamo had been closed by Obama was now in the media headlines. Even mainstream comedy such as the [Colbert Report](#) and the [Daily Show](#) were talking about the protest.

Witness Against Torture orchestrated a rolling fast which called for people to fast for a day, write a letter to a detainee and make phone calls to Southcom, the Department of Defense, and The White House. Over 250 people have signed up for the rolling fast. Human rights organizations such as Codepink, Reprieve and Veterans for Peace also organized a rolling fast. Over a thousand folks have signed on to the Codepink fast, including such names as Julian Assange and Deepak Chopra.

Cities from the west, east and in between began organizing weekly vigils and demonstrations. The London Guantanamo Campaign holds a monthly demo in front of the American Embassy. Latin America and Australia also staged protests. A coalition of over 20 groups who have been working to close Guantanamo came together to form [CloseGitmo.net](#). Included in the coalition

On April 14, 2013 The New York times published an op-ed by hunger striking detainee Samir Naji al Hasan Moqbel, Gitmo Is Killing Me. Matthew D., who has read almost every article that has come out about Guantanamo since 2005 described it as the most heart-breaking piece.

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. 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. 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 Yemens president do something, that is what I risk every day.

Numerous letters from Guantanamo have been published. A collection of them can be found on my [personal web site](#). Shaker Aamers wife, [Umm Johina](#) has also published letters through her facebook account.

On April 30, 2013 Obama made a second promise to close the prison during a National Defense Speech, using much of the same language as he did during his first promise in 2009.

2009, Protecting Our System and Our Values speech by Obama:

So going forward, my administration will work with Congress to develop an appropriate legal regime to handle such detainees so that our efforts are consistent with our values and our Constitution.

2013, White House news conference when asked about the hunger strike:

I've asked my team to review everything thats currently being done in Guantanamo, everything that we can do administratively, and Im going to re-engage with Congress to try to make the case that this is not something thats in the best interests of the American people.

Since Obamas second promise, the ban on releasing Yemeni prisoners was lifted, a State Department envoy and Pentagon envoy were appointed, and the Periodic Review Board (PRB) started closed meetings in November 2013. According to Guantanamo attorneys, it is unknown whether the PRB is a positive or negative in closing the prison. Two Algerians, Nabil Hadjarab and Mutia Sadiq Ahmad Sayyab were the first to be released from GTMO in September 2013. Two more Algerians, Djamel Ameziane and Belkacem Bensayah were involuntarily sent back to Algeria. Djamel is a citizen of Algeria and fled the country during the Algerian Civil War where he became a chef in Canada. His family is in Canada and wishes to return to them.

By summer, the hunger strike surpassed 100 days. Activists accross the country continued to bare hot summer days inside orange jumpsuits and black hoods. A small group of activists went on their own hunger strikes lasting upwards of more than 80 days. In one case, [Andres Thomas Conteris](#) has undergone live tube-feedings in both the U.S., and Latin America.

On June 26, 2013, International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, hundreds of protesters gathered in front of The White House. Diane Wilson, a solidarity hunger striker on her 57th day of hunger strikes [scaled the White House](#) fence in an attempt to deliver a message to the President. She was arrested and charged with unlawful entry, given 90 days suspended prison and a \$200 fine.

The first Senate Hearing on Guantanamo since 2009 was held on July 24, 2013. In the hearing, ranking member Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) suggested that President Obama thinks the United States should take a holiday from the war on terror. Cruz and others brought up the perceived threat of detainee recidivism several times during the hearing, which lasted one hour and 45 minutes.

Witnesses at the hearing repeatedly mentioned that the federal court system has effectively tried over 500 terrorism-related cases. Though the figure is technically correct, journalist Trevor Aaronson has shown in his book The Terror Factory that many of those cases were in fact created and managed by the FBI through stings, and that the actual number of legitimate terrorist threats has been far lower.

House Rep. Adam Smith (D-Washington) also testified before the committee about the need to close Guantanamo. While Smith stated that the Constitution applies fully at the prison because of the Supreme Courts 2008 ruling in Boumediene v. Bush, which determined detainees had habeas corpus rights, this is not entirely accurate.

11 men have been released from Guantanamo, 8 of those in the past month, December 2013. And so 155 men remain languishing behind prison walls, 76 of which have been cleared for release since January 2010 by an inter-agency task force established by President Obama. The hunger strike continues despite a media black out. The last official report of hunger strikers released from the DoD was 15 on December 2, 2013. It has been reported from detainees to attorneys that there are at least 70 men on hunger strike with the numbers increasing daily.

It is now one year since Witness Against Torture last gathered in Washington, DC. It is the time of year I look forward to as a reunion. In past years others and myself have said we wished it were for a better occasion. This year, the feeling of a reunion is absent as I have since seen friends from WAT throughout the year. Guantanamo has never left my heart and mind since the last Fast for Justice a small sacrifice in order to echo the voices inside Guantanamo Bay Prison. I look forward to reuniting with the [Blue Lantern Project](#), a group of artists based out of NYC who will be attending their first Fast for Justice here in DC. The Blue Lantern Project was birthed after the Guantanamo hunger strike, and pays homage to a lantern made by [Fayiz Mohammed al-Kandari](#).

A response to a letter from Feinstein:

Thank you for contacting me to express your support for closing the United States detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This is an important issue, and I welcome the opportunity to share my point of view with you.

I continue to support the closure of Guantanamo Bay, consistent with the need to prosecute, transfer, or hold the remaining detainees appropriately.

Upon taking office in January 2009, President Obama ordered that the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba be closed within a year. However, for various reasons, the detention center is still in operation today and houses 166 detainees as of June 2013. Of those prisoners, 86 have been officially cleared for transfer since 2010, 34 have yet to be indicted, and 46 are under preventative detention, meaning that they will be held under international law until the end of hostilities with al Qaeda. Partly in response to this uncertainty, as of the time of my visit to Guantanamo on June 7, 2013, 104 detainees were participating in hunger-strikes, 44 of whom were being force-fed.

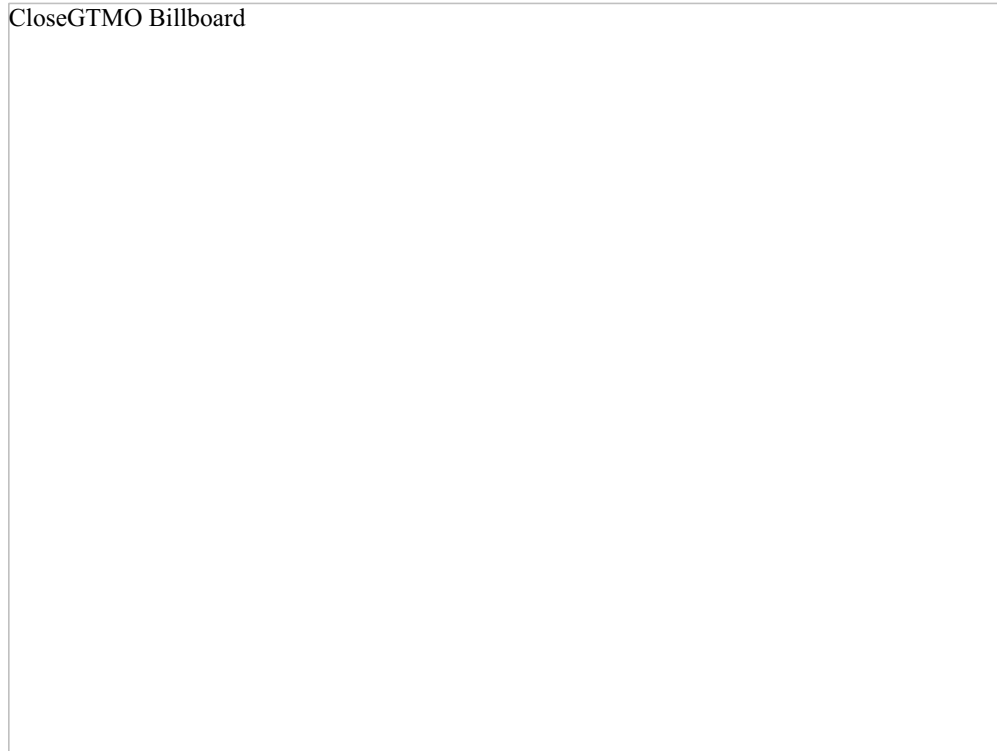
I have long felt that Guantanamo has tarnished the American image abroad and done great harm to our Nations counterterrorism efforts, and I continue to believe that our federal courts and maximum security prison system are fully capable of dealing with highly dangerous individuals. I also support the Presidents ongoing efforts to relocate 56 of the 86 detainees who are Yemeni and have been approved for transfer out of Guantanamo. Transfer does not mean these detainees will be released. Transfer means they could still be detained by foreign governments. I was also pleased to learn of President Obamas decision to appoint a new Special Envoy for Closure of the Guantanamo Detention Facility at the State Department.

Again, thank you for your letter. Please be assured that I will continue to do everything necessary to achieve the goal of closing Guantanamo in an effective and safe manner. If you have any additional comments or questions, please feel free to contact my Washington, D.C. staff at [\(202\) 224-3841](tel:2022243841). Best regards.

Sincerely yours,
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Further information about my position on issues of concern to California and the nation are available at my website, feinstein.senate.gov. And please visit my [YouTube](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for more ways to communicate with me.

CloseGTMO Billboard



Caption for the photo of the billboard (A billboard from the CloseGitmo.net campaign went up today four miles east of I-95 on Hwy 70 in Johnston County, NC. The Johnston Co. Airport is home to Aero Contractors, notorious torture taxis that delivered suspects to Guantanamo and other black sites.)

The billboard will be up for 6 months and yes, if people want to make this happen a billboard in their area, they can. Money is an incidental. If the community will is there and strong enough the necessary funding will be found. Lack of funds should not stop any individual or group. Its always a question of will.

People do various things to strengthen their will for example the recent call to use discipline, sacrifice and resolve to fast every Friday in solidarity with Guantnamo and other prisoners, makes one stronger, even physically stronger. The hunger reminds one, in case one forgets, of why they are sacrificing food for a day, what they are in solidarity with. Contrary to what some believe, doing without solid food for a day actually increases (barring a conflicting medical condition) ones energy.

In my case, I was reluctant to fast when I embarked on the long one but my rage at the cruelty at Guantnamo and here in U.S. prisons fueled the desire to do something. Rage, and the other veterans who were already on hunger strike, Diane Wilson, Elliott and Brian Willson, ignited my willingness to do without, to make that 58-day sacrifice. Ultimately it strengthened me. I now know I can do something I previously thought was beyond my capacity. I also know that many people all fasting on the same day every week can make a difference.

The billboards, the fasting, the actions, its all connected. Many of us find different ways to sacrifice, not everybody can or wants to do a fast, I know that. That said and not to sound overly dramatic but nothing significant will happen, no real change in this warped system

will occur without individual and group commitment and sacrifice. The commitment to offer oneself up for the cause is fueled by intense dissatisfaction (to put it lightly) with the status quo. I think sacrifice is the price we must pay for change. The positive side is that if it, (sacrifice) does not get you killed, it makes you stronger.

When hopes and dreams are loose in the street, it is well for the timid to lock doors, shutter windows and lie low until the wrath has passed . . .

There are seasons, in human affairs, of inward and outward revolution, when new depths seem to be broken up in the soul, when new wants are unfolded in multitudes, and a new and undefined good is thirsted for. There are periods when to dare, is the highest wisdom.

Peace.
Tarak

Erie, Pennsylvania

Erie Catholic Worker
Jan 6-13. 5:15PM to 5:45PM at the federal building.
Contact: annemccosb@yahoo.com

Saratoga, Florida

Saratoga Peace Alliance
Jan 5-10 12PM-1PM at the downtown post office.
Contact: linda@scolex.org

Boston, Massachusetts

Committee for Peace and Human Rights
Jan 11 1-2PM at Park Street Station on the Boston Common
Contact: susanbmcl@gmail.com

Chicago, Illinois

Chicago Coalition to Shut Down Guantanamo
Jan 10 4:30-5:30PM Dearborn and Jackson
[Join on Facebook](#)

12 Years Too Many, An Evening to discuss and dissent

Jan 11 6:30PM-9:30PM
Chicago Danz Theatre
[Join on Facebook](#)

Santa Monica, California

Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace
Jan 11 3PM-4PM Santa Monica Palisades Park
Contact: andy.icujp@gmail.com

London

London Guantanamo Campaign
Jan 11 2-4PM Trafalgar Square, outside National Gallery
[Join on Facebook](#)

The World Cant Wait Tour with Andy Worthington and Debra Sweet

Jeff Kaye, Michael Kearns, Jason Leopold, and Todd Pierce will join Andy and Debra
Jan 9-17
[Join on Facebook](#)

Fawzi al-Odah, 30, is a Kuwaiti primary school teacher whose father, a retired air force pilot, fought with US forces during the Gulf War in 1991.

According to his own account, which he gave to a military tribunal at Guantanamo, he took a short holiday from work and traveled to Afghanistan in August 2001 to teach the Koran and provide humanitarian aid.

This was something he had done before, in other countries, and his family had had a history of providing humanitarian aid, establishing libraries and wells in various countries in Africa.

After establishing contact with the Taliban, which he said was necessary because that was the government in Afghanistan at that time, Mr Odah said he had been touring the schools and visiting families, teaching the Koran and handing out money, until his activities had been curtailed following 9/11.

He said that in Kandahar the Taliban representative told me that was a dangerous place because it was the capital for the Taliban, and had advised him to go to Logar, in the east of the country, where he had stayed with a family for a month, and left his passport and belongings for safekeeping.

If the Afghans saw I had a passport indicating I was an Arab, and they saw the money and the camera I had, I would have been killed, he added.

He had then moved to Jalalabad, where he had stayed with another family, who had given him an AK-47 assault rifle to protect himself,

Mr Odah said.

He had then joined other people crossing the mountains to Pakistan, where he had handed himself in to the border guards, he added.

Mr Odah said he expected to be escorted to the Kuwaiti embassy, but had instead been handed over to US forces.

He joined a widespread hunger strike in Guantanamo in August 2005.

In his latest military review, he was not accused of participating in hostilities against US forces, but of:

firing a Kalashnikov [AK-47] rifle at some targets at a small camp where he had been taken by a Taliban official

staying in a house in Jalalabad with three Arabs who appear to be fighters who carried Kalashnikovs, and

fleeing Afghanistan with a group of men who may have had some al-Qaeda or Taliban members

Eight of the Kuwaiti detainees have already been released from Guantanamo.

According to Mr Odah's lawyers, the State Department's senior legal adviser, John Bellinger, said Mr Odah and the three other Kuwaiti detainees were still in Guantanamo because the Kuwaiti government had broken the rules the US administration had tried to impose on them when the other eight men had been released.

The lawyers say the Americans had wanted the men to be tried and imprisoned on their return, but the Kuwaiti court hearing the trial found no case to answer and released them.

[View this complete profile on Andy Worthington's web site.](#)

Palina is the youngest of eight children and an immigrant from Laos. Her father fought in the Lao Peoples Army on the side of the United States in the Vietnam war. After the war was lost, in order to avoid assassination by the Vietcong, Palina's family spent nearly a year in a refugee camp in Thailand in 1979 before settling in Falls Church, Virginia. She was raised a Baptist and also attended Buddhist temples until the age of eight when she became agnostic-atheist.

Palina's father was an art professor in Laos and became a janitor in the states while her mother worked two jobs. He passed away on September 16, 2011 after complications from diabetes. He taught her how to write her name, paint, and fry an egg: all before she was old enough to go to school.

Palina spent a majority of her childhood in her room reading, writing, drawing, making home videos, and making fake diarrhea commercials on cassette tapes. She was extremely shy, to the point where she flunked kindergarten and was a never-nude until the age of fifteen. She also caught her front yard on fire and on a different occasion, a 32 gallon trash can. Palina's sister interviewed her after the incident for her pretend news channel. To which, Palina told her sister she wanted to know what would happen.

Palina later went on to attend Baileys Elementary School For the Arts and Sciences where her scratch-n-sniff red pepper drawings were the craze of the first grade. That would be her last academic accomplishment besides from getting voted Most likely to turn into a cartoon in high school. By her senior year in high school the only class she was enrolled in was a two-hour class on radio/television production, where she would spend an additional 8-10 hours a day at.

In 2006 she gave school another chance with the intentions of finishing a degree in Elementary Education. By her third semester she found herself dropping classes in order to work on films. After the Guantanamo Bay hunger strikes began in 2013, she relocated from Des Moines, Iowa to New York City in order to be closer to Washington, DC. She is currently a writer, photographer, volunteer at the Maryhouse Catholic Worker, and mother to a daughter as old as the war in Afghanistan.

[The Cost of Omar Khadr's Missing Years](#)

[David Remes on Guantanamo in 2013](#)