

# Witness Against Torture

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

**<https://witnessagainsttorture.com/2015/02/18/an-open-letter-to-john-mccain/>**

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Senator John McCain  
241 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington DC, 20510

Dear Senator McCain,

I am the woman who spoke out in the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the status of the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay on February 5th. Im sure you heard my words, Give them the rights of prisoners of war! before I was arrested.

I attended the hearing in an orange jump suit to silently protest the very existence of Guantanamo prison, and I expected to hear a reasonably rational discussion of the pris-on and its future. I planned to listen respectfully, holding my sign reading I died waiting for justice: Adnan Latif, Died September 8, 2012, to remind the Senators and admin-istration officials that Adnan Latif either committed suicide or was killed at Guantanamo after ten years of torture and unjust detention, and six years after being cleared for re-lease. The Capitol police appropriately allowed me to peacefully express my opposition to Guantanamo in that public forum.

I was so shocked, however, by the vitriol of the senators who chose to attend the hear-ing that I felt I had to respond. I was appalled by their hateful statements statements that contribute to a hostile climate that foments tragic hate crimes. Less than a week after the hearing three young Muslim Americans were murdered in North Carolina al-most certainly because they were Muslim.

Although Senator Graham talked about following the laws of war and the principles of the Geneva Conventions, his Senate colleagues made it clear that they care little about such things. Senator Cotton would have more Muslim men locked up as terrorists in Guantanamo without due process. He certainly wouldnt want them tried in an open court where they could face their accusers and challenge the evidence used against them: The only problem with Guantanamo Bay is that there are too many empty beds and cells. We should be sending more terrorists there to keep this country safe. As far as Im concerned, every last one of them can rot in hell. But as long as they dont do that then they can rot in Guantanamo Bay.

Senator Manchin thinks the detainees are not being treated harshly enough: Id like to see a few of them in the United States hardened prisons to see if theyd change their attitude just a little bit. I know we could do a little different job on em here than theyre doing over there.

And when I exhorted the committee to at least give the men at Guantanamo the rights of prisoners of war, Sen. Manchin responded by saying, I just want to say their attack on this country they lost their rights. Think about that: a U.S. Senator doesnt think that human beings in U.S. custody should have rights. Not one Senator spoke up in disagreement.

I wonder if Sen. Manchin shares the attitude of former vice president Dick Cheney who, when asked for comment on the torture practices revealed by the Senate Intelligence Committee report of early December, replied: Id do it again in a minute. Indeed, it sounded to me as though several of your colleagues are of Cheneys mindset.

I must ask, what about you, Sen. McCain? And, if not, why have you not publicly dis-tanced yourself from Cheneys remarks and those of your Senate colleagues?

I remember admiring your doing what you could to rebuff Cheney and then CIA Director Porter Goss, when they descended on your office to plead for a CIA exemption from the amendment you were pushing banning torture.

As a captive in North Vietnam, you had first-hand experience with torture. Given that, and recalling your principled opposition to torture a decade ago, it is painful for me to watch you sit placidly as some of your colleagues indulge in hateful demagoguery. I trust that you are particularly aware of the importance of upholding the rights and dignity of all prisoners, including those held in U.S. custody.

As ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, you took active part in the Senate Armed Forces Committee Inquiry Into the Treatment of Detainees in U.S. Custody. The First Conclusion of the report released on December 11, 2008 stated that a Presidential Order signed by President George W. Bush opened the door to con-sidering aggressive techniques.

The report noted specifically that on Feb. 7, 2002, the President issued a written deter-mination that the Geneva Convention protections for POWs did not apply to al-Qaeda or Taliban detainees, and that following that determination, techniques like waterboarding were

authorized for use in interrogation. It would take more than four years for the U.S. Supreme Court to rule, in June 2006, that the prisoners right to habeas corpus rights was being violated by the Military Commissions Act.

This year marks the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta with which courageous Eng-lish nobles wrested from King John the writ of habeas corpus and other rights. I am embarrassed for my country that President Bush suspended that fundamental right for so many years, and opened the door for torture. Worse still, torture continues at Guantanamo, and you and others in high office have the power to stop it.

Guantanamo detainees were subjected to torture techniques masked as enhanced in-terrogation (waterboarding, multiple forms of sensory deprivation, sensory overload and sexual humiliation the list goes on and on). And you and your Senate colleagues should remember that they are still being subjected to torture (e.g., long-term solitary confinement, brutal forced-feeding procedures, forcible cell extractions) as well as out-rages upon their personal dignity (e.g., genital searches and cavity searches before and after meeting with their lawyers).

Senator McCain, I imagine you may regret calling lowlife scum those of us who, at Congressional hearings, speak out against consigning the Magna Carta, the Constitu-tion, and the rule of law to the dustbin of history. With all due respect, it is lowlife for public officials to pander to the worst of human instincts revenge, racism, and scape-goating no matter how many votes such appeals might garner. It does you no credit to preside and sit by nonchalantly at the shameful hearing on February 5 at which I am proud to have been arrested.

You need to use your chairmanship to restore respect for the rule of law, and lift the United States out of the category of rogue state. In the name of common decency, I urge you, as Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, to insist that the U.S. begin according the Guantanamo prisoners in U.S. custody their lawful human rights.

Yours truly,

Helen Schietinger  
Washington, DC