

Center for Constitutional Rights

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

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Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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Sharqawi Al Hajj Cut Wrist While on Attorney Call

September 10, 2019, Washington, D.C. Today, a federal judge refused to order an independent medical evaluation of Sharqawi Al Hajj, a prisoner at Guantanamo who recently attempted suicide. Mr. Al Hajj has been detained for more than 17 years and, for two years before his arrival at Guantanamo, was tortured in secret CIA detention. When his attorneys initially requested the evaluation and the release of Mr. Al Hajj's medical records, in 2017, medical experts warned he was on the precipice of total body collapse. Since then, his mental and physical condition has steadily deteriorated, to the point that he began making specific suicidal statements. Last month, Mr. Al Hajj made an actual attempt on his life when he cut his wrist while on the phone with his attorney.

In the face of Guantnamo's inability to change the course of Mr. Al Hajj's mental health trajectory from suicidal statements to actual attempt, and independent medical opinion that Mr. Al Hajj is actively suicidal, the courts denial of an outside medical evaluation takes a chance with Mr. Al Hajj's life, said Center for Constitutional Rights Senior Staff Attorney [Pardiss Kebriaei](#). Mr. Al Hajj's attempt was not taken seriously, and it was seen as volitional harm of his own making, as if he weren't a prisoner we had tortured and imprisoned without charge for 17 years, with still no prospect of release, and as if willfulness matters in the assessment of real risk.

Attorneys filed an emergency motion in September 2017, seeking an independent medical evaluation and the release of Mr. Al Hajj's medical records, after he fell unconscious following a hunger strike during which he stopped drinking water. Declarations from medical experts submitted to the court warned that Mr. Al Hajj was in danger of imminent irreparable harm and on the precipice of total bodily collapse. They cited both pre-existing health conditions as well as the effects of Mr. Al Hajj's indefinite detention and two years of torture in secret CIA custody.

Over the next two years, Mr. Al Hajj's physical and mental health were in steady decline, and his lawyers requested to appear before the court three times: first in October 2018, out of concern for his mental health, again in July 2019, when he first made explicit suicidal statements, and in August 2019, after Mr. Al Hajj cut his wrist with a piece of glass while on the phone with his attorney.

The Center for Constitutional Rights raised an alarm about Mr. Al Hajj in a [statement](#) released before his suicide attempt was public. In it, attorneys noted that other Guantanamo prisoners have died or been near death before, that the government has downplayed the severity of health risks or distorted the meaning of desperate acts describing them as ploys for release or even asymmetric warfare and that despair of the sort Mr. Al Hajj is experiencing is the predictable consequence of nearly two decades of indefinite detention, on the heels of torture, and still no prospect for release.

On September 10, a coalition of human rights, civil liberties, and faith-based organizations [wrote](#) to the Secretary of Defense expressing concern over Mr. Al Hajj's suicide attempt and calling for an independent medical evaluation.

For more information, [visit the Center for Constitutional Rights case page](#).

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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