

Center for Constitutional Rights

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

<https://ccrjustice.org/anser-mehmood>

Campaign and Advocacy

Anser Mehmood currently lives in Pakistan with his father, wife, and four children. He is a plaintiff in [Ziglar v. Abbasi](#) (formerly *Turkmen v. Ashcroft*), a lawsuit filed in 2002 on behalf of a class of Muslim, South Asian, and Arab non-citizens swept up in connection with the 9/11 investigation. From October 2001 to April 2002, Anser was detained at the Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC) in Brooklyn, New York, where he was held in harsh and punishing solitary confinement in the Administrative Maximum Special Housing Unit (ADMAX SHU). He was then detained at Passaic County Jail in New Jersey from April 2002 to May 2002. Like nearly a hundred other men, Anser was detained as a "terrorism suspect" based solely on his race, religion, ethnicity, and immigration status, and abused in brutal detention conditions for the many months it took the FBI and CIA to clear him of any connection to terrorism.

At a time of political turmoil, Anser left Pakistan in 1988 and moved to the United States in search of financial opportunity and security. He entered the U.S. on a business visa and stayed after that visa expired. His wife and three children eventually joined him, and they lived in Bayonne, New Jersey, where their fourth child was born in 2000. Anser used the money he made selling his business in Pakistan to start a trucking business. He saved enough money to buy a house and send money home to his family in Pakistan. "From the day I entered [the] USA in 1988 until 9/11, I never had a hard time...my kids were studying in U.S. schools and life was very smooth. So until 9/11, I have all good memories," he recalls.

On the morning of October 3, 2001, a team of FBI and INS agents arrived at Anser's home and questioned him and his wife about their immigration status and their relatives. Anser acknowledged that he had overstayed his visa, and showed the agents the social security number he was using to work. He was arrested, but told that he would be out on bail within days since he only faced a minor immigration violation. Anser was handcuffed and transported first to an INS detention center and then to MDC. His arrest was the result of an FBI investigation of the lead that "a male possibly Arab" left a fake social security card and passport at the New Jersey DMV.

"I was targeted by the U.S. government because I was Muslim and a truck driver. The FBI knew that I was innocent...after picking me up from my home, not a single person came to me to ask any questions during my whole stay at MDC and Passaic jail. From day one, they knew I was innocent. [They] picked me up from my home because I'm Muslim."

His abuse began the moment he entered MDC, when he was dragged from the van by several large corrections officers, who threw him into several walls on his way into the facility. His left hand was broken during this incident. When a guard asked him if he knew why he was at MDC, Anser responded that he was there for overstaying his visa. The guard disagreed, and said he was there for the attack on the World Trade Center.

"I was thrown in a cell they called...a hole, but I called it a grave. [They] put [an] innocent person in a grave for a period of four months, the guards didn't let us sleep, abused us and all Muslims, and called me and other inmates 'camels'. I kept asking Al Mighty Allah SWT, what have I done that I'm getting this type of punishment? Where had the...pillars of human rights of the U.S. Constitution gone?"

Anser was placed in the ADMAX SHU without justification. He was denied access to the outside world, including an attorney and the Pakistani consulate, arbitrarily and abusively strip-searched, subjected to sleep deprivation and interference with his religious practice, denied basic personal items like soap and toilet paper, and deprived of adequate food. During his detention, Anser was concerned about how his family was surviving in his absence. Upon hearing news reports of Anser's detention, neighbors in New Jersey harassed his family, and his children were isolated and taunted at school. Anser's wife could not support the family without his financial contribution, and in February 2002, they were forced to return to Pakistan.

Anser pled guilty to working with an unauthorized social security number and was sentenced to eight months in prison. On April 4, 2002, he was transferred to Passaic County Jail, in New Jersey, and then was deported to Pakistan on May 10, 2002. He has faced considerable challenges since. He lost his home and business due to his detention, and has had trouble finding the same financial security in Pakistan that he once enjoyed in the U.S. The physical and psychological effects of detention have had a lasting impact on Anser, and motivate him to continue pursuing justice in federal court:

"I [would] like to see [Defendants] admit that they arrested the wrong people...that these people were innocent and don't have anything to do with [9/11]. I was put in a hole in MDC because I'm Muslim, and even after 15 years...I still feel embarrassed to have been handcuffed and shackled."

Despite the challenges, Anser has hope for the future. His children have continued their education and started businesses, and he hopes in that in a few years he and his family will be in better position than before.

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