

Center for Constitutional Rights

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

<https://ccrjustice.org/home/press-center/press-releases/tortured-gitmo-detainee-had-history-severe-mental-illness>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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June 15, 2016 Tomorrow morning Guantanamo detainee Mohammed al Qahtani will have a hearing before a Periodic Review Board to determine whether he can safely be transferred to the custody of Saudi Arabia.

Al Qahtani was systematically tortured under a Special Interrogation Plan, designed to disorient, sexually humiliate, and psychologically destroy him, based on the suspicion that he might have been the 20th hijacker. He is the only prisoner whose abuse has been formally described as torture by a senior U.S. government official, when the head of the Military Commissions explained that she had refused to authorize charges seeking the death penalty against him because we tortured Qahtani.

Filings made before the Periodic Review Board disclose, for the first time, that from an early age al Qahtani suffered from schizophrenia, major depression, and possible traumatic brain injury. He was mentally ill not only prior to his imprisonment and torture at Guantanamo, but also long before the government claims he was invited into the secretive, closely-guarded 9/11 conspiracy. Records independently located by the Center for Constitutional Rights show that al Qahtani was involuntarily committed to a mental hospital in Mecca in May 2000 because he suffered an acute psychotic break and attempted to throw himself into moving traffic. Saudi police once found him naked in a garbage dumpster, and he heard voices and suffered other classic symptoms of psychosis throughout his adolescence. A psychiatric experts report, based on the hospitalization records, other investigative work, and many hours of examination of al Qahtani, was filed with the Review Board as well.

Mohammed was already mentally ill long before the time when the government alleges that he first met anyone involved in plotting anything. It would be passing cruel to put a person like that on trial or to continue to imprison him, said **Ramzi Kassem**, a law professor at the City University of New York whose legal clinic represents al Qahtani with the Center for Constitutional Rights.

The obvious manifestations of Mohammed's illness hearing voices, speaking to nonexistent people were plain to see even before the worst of his abuse began. The people who designed and carried out his torture-and-interrogation plan must have known in advance that it could not possibly produce reliable information, said [Shayana Kadidal](#), Senior Managing Attorney of the Guantanamo project at CCR, which has represented al Qahtani since 2005. Between his torture and his psychosis, he can never be tried. Rather than warehouse him forever at Guantanamo, Mohammed should be committed to a mental hospital in Saudi Arabia that can care for someone with his conditions.

Read the attorneys [statement](#) to the Periodic Review Board.

Read more about Mohammed al Qahtani on his [case page](#).

The Center for Constitutional Rights has led the legal battle over Guantanamo for more than 14 years representing clients in two Supreme Court cases and organizing and coordinating hundreds of pro bono lawyers across the country, ensuring that nearly all the men detained at Guantanamo have had the option of legal representation. Among other Guantanamo cases, the Center represents the families of men who died at Guantanamo, and men who have been released and are seeking justice in international courts.

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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