

Witness Against Torture

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

<https://witnessagainstitorture.com/2014/01/06/fast-for-justice-2014-day-1/>

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.

January 11, 2014 marks the twelfth anniversary of the U.S. detention center at Guantanamo Bay, the eighth anniversary of Witness Against Torture's January 11 presence in D.C., and our sixth liquids fast.

For the next 8 days, we are fasting in Washington, DC for the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. We wish to frame this act thusly:

This is not about us. This is NOT about the United States cutting itself out of the patchwork of the family quilt of humanity. This is about 155 men who have been stuck in prison cells in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for up to 12 years, who continue to count the days, weeks, months and years they must wait to go home.

Who are these men? Where did they come from? How and why were they captured so many years ago to be held prisoners in Cuba by the U.S. military? And when will they regain their freedom?

Through our actions this week fasting and vigiling we reach out to them to connect. We will connect you too through a daily update, which will include a report of what we did here in DC, reflections from fasters, and links to news articles.

Finally, each day we will share a profile of one GTMO detainee and one WAT member. We invite you to discover your connections to the prisoners as we explore our own by introducing ourselves beside them.

In Peace,
Witness Against Torture
*let us know if you will join us for a day, or days of fasting

Please change your profile picture on Facebook to the image on our page and **like us on [Facebook](#), then [follow us on Twitter](#).**

Post any pictures of your local activities to [Flickr](#), and we will help spread the word on [Tumblr](#).
In this e-mail you will find:

Its 5:45AM and Mary Grace, a fellow faster participating in the Fast for Justice has the chore of waking up the first dozen who have arrived in DC.

By 6:15AM, we have dressed ourselves in orange jumpsuits ready to begin our walk to the train station: next stop, Pentagon City. There, we are greeted by Art of the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker. For more than 30 years, every Monday, the Dorothy Day community has held a vigil at the Pentagon. We begin with an update on Guantanamo 155 remain and 11 have been released from GTMO since the hunger strike.

The following are some reflections from those gathered at the Pentagon:

Ellen: No hoods today because we were not allowed to cover our face [Virginia law]. With the mask, you know that nobody knows who you are. When wearing hoods, the lack of a sight line means we need people with us to show us where to step up a curb as we walk across a street, or when not to cross because it's a red light. Today the big difference was the eye contact. Eye contact means so much to me because my basic connection with the world is other people.

Becky: I forget I'm wearing the suit, just smiling and talking to people, like hey how's it going! And for a split second there's a smile, eye contact, then once again people are washing over, but there was this recognition, just for a split second, and I'm puzzled.

Fin: ..For me there was a moment when I realized that a few of the people were willing to make eye contact with us. I got that from the woman next to me I noticed she made deliberate attempt to make eye contact until that person broke contact. In that passing moment we let someone know we were here in order to let people see those who are not able to be here.

Becky: the free speech zone, fences and gates and all of the parking and the buses and the trains meet here, which is an entrance to the entrance. To me it's sad that the world has come to this. This is what national security looks like: these ridiculous protocols and men languishing in Guantanamo and in prisons all over

Michael: I was moved when we sang a song [Courage Muslim Brother]. It has this really beautiful melody that repeats in a soft tone. I felt like I was serenading the workers as they came in, with the song transmitting calmness and peace.

Ellen: (quoting a detainee) my family, my wife my kids my mom misses me, I need to get back, I need to see them. But now Ive heard of some Americans who are in our favor who are trying to help us.

Why am I fasting? Lets see if I can say at this point.

My last meal was 14 hours ago. I have pangs of hunger which once upon a time would have terrified me. Im going to starve to death! a voice might scream at me inside my head.

A few minutes ago, walking in a hallway leading to the St. Stephen office in which I write, I passed an upright cabinet in the hallway with a sign on the left door that read, Brain Food. The second word entered into some deep, dark place in my psyche, and became a whisper of cookies and milk. Its reverberating echoes had settled into silence by the time I made it into the office. I checked in with my stomach, and the pain had not increased since the fifth hour in.

How much worse can it get? Certainly no louder, as of a few hours ago its grumbles had a brief but noisy exchange with a fellow fasters stomach sitting clear on the other side of the room.

And then I have wondered how we, here in Washington, D.C., can be in solidarity just by not eating, with men thousands of miles away with whom we have almost nothing in common.

Wait we have quite a bit in common. We, like they, are hungering for justice.

Debra Van Poolen is an artist, farmer, and activist. She grew up moving around the midwest, attending ten different schools as her dad took various positions in insurance. Her nomadic lifestyle continued into adulthood spanning from Oregon to Montana to India where she studied subsistence farming and worked in counter-development. She spent 2013 in the Washington DC area to document each day of the Chelsea Manning trial with courtroom sketches. She is currently hitchhiking from NYC with a couple bags of luggage back to Chicago where her belongings have been stored. Throughout 2014 she will be an apprentice at an electricity-and-petroleum-free farm called the Possibility Alliance in Missouri, where she will help the White Rose Catholic Worker establish itself.

Debra spent a night in jail in Helena, Montana for a protest on March 20, 2003, the first night of the Iraq War. Her first court room sketch was during a trial of Witness Against Torture activists in January 2012. She enjoys various aspects of several religions. She is most interested in creating loving connections.

In June 2001, Shaker went to Afghanistan to do volunteer work for an Islamic charity. After September 11th, when the bombing of Kabul began, Shaker went into hiding with an Afghan family.

Soldiers arrived at the house, stripped Shaker of his belongings and took him away at gunpoint. For the next two weeks Shaker was sold to various groups of soldiers, who accused him of killing their leader and beat him mercilessly. The abuse continued, and when Shaker and four other Arab prisoners were driven out of Kabul one night, he thought the end had come and they were to be executed.

Instead, the sound of a helicopter and American accents filled him with relief. Americans! he thought. We are saved! In fact, his transfer to US forces marked the beginning of a new nightmare. Shaker arrived at Bagram Air Force Base at the end of December 2001 where he suffered terrible abuse.

Forced to stay awake for nine days straight and denied food, he dropped 60 pounds in weight. US personnel would dump freezing water him. This treatment, combined with the bitter Afghan winter, caused Shakers feet to become frostbitten. He was chained for hours in positions that made movement unbearable, and his swollen, blackened feet were beaten. He was refused the painkillers he begged for.

Twelve years later, the torture continues. Shaker reported to his attorney, Clive Stafford Smith, that in retaliation for his participation in the on-going hunger strike, the guards have subjected him to additional sleep deprivation and physical abuse.

Shaker has been named the Voice of Guantanamo. In November 2013, his voice was heard through the cells doors during a tour of the prison by CBSs 60 Minutes:

Tell the world the truth Please, we are tired. Either you leave us to die in peace or either tell the world the truth. Open up the place. Let the world come and visit. Let the world hear whats happeningIt is very sad what is happening in this place.

Shaker is one of 15 known men currently on hunger strike in Guantanamo, one of 76 who have been cleared for release, and the last British resident in the prison. He has been cleared since 2007 by a military review board and again by President Obamas inter-agency Guantanamo Review Task Force in 2010. Aamers British wife and their four British-born children, reside in London, England the youngest child he has never met.

Rally and procession to mark the 12th anniversary of Guantnamo, and to demand its closure.

WHERE: White House (1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW., Washington, D.C.)

Noon Gather for rally and witness at the White House (1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW)

1 p.m. Procession leaves from White House, ends at 2:30 p.m.

Housing: Free housing available at a D.C. church on January 10. Email witnesstorture@gmail.com for more info.

Twitter: #CloseGitmo

Sponsoring Organizations: [Center for Constitutional Rights](#), [Witness Against Torture](#), [Amnesty International](#), [CODEPINK: Women For Peace](#), [National Religious Campaign Against Torture](#), [the World Cant Wait](#), [Veterans for Peace](#), Blue Lantern Project, [CloseGitmo.net](#) & others.

This January 11, 2014 marks the unacceptable 12th anniversary of indefinite detention without charge or trial at Guantnamo. Join us in Washington, D.C. to witness this anniversary together, and to call on President Obama to finally fulfill his broken promise to shut it down. Obama has the power to close Guantnamo, and the new National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA 2014) just approved by Congress makes it even easier for him to do so. 158 men remain detained at Guantnamo; most should never have been detained in the first place and are entering their 13th year of being deprived of their liberty without any charge or trial. They must be tried in a fair court or released; Guantnamo must be shut down.

Witness Against Torture is completely volunteer driven and run. We have no paid staff, but do have expenses associated with our organizing work. If you are able, [please donate here](#).