

Witness Against Torture

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

<https://witnessagainsttorture.com/2020/12/03/wats-letter-to-president-elect-joe-biden/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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October 2020

Dear Vice-President Biden, Senator Harris, and the Biden/Harris Campaign,

We are Witness Against Torture (WAT), a group founded in 2005 with the goal of closing the prison camp at Guantanamo and ending U.S. torture. We are writing to urge you in the event of the Biden/Harris victory we all seek to make good on your campaign pledge to at last close the prison.

For years, we have fasted, demonstrated, lobbied, written letters, and been jailed for non-violent Civil Disobedience, in the best tradition of John Lewis and Dr. King. On two occasions some of us physically went to Cuba to protest the U.S. prison at its edge. We have made, in short, good trouble on behalf of a worthy goal you share.

Like us, countless other Americans passionately believe that Guantanamo must close and that the Muslim victims of horrific American abuses must receive some measure of justice.

Guantanamo is a stain on the nations soul, an ongoing threat to Americas security, and a place of the enduring abuse of Muslim men, many of whom have never been charged with crimes. We are heartened by your pledge to revive the efforts of the Obama/Biden administration to shutter the prison. We are especially grateful for the leading role Senator Biden has taken, even before becoming Vice President, in condemning the prison and urging its closure.

But we are also painfully aware of the catastrophic failure of the Obama administration to make good on its day one Executive Order to close Guantanamo. Yes, Republicans in Congress vigorously opposed Obamas efforts. Yet a lack of political will was the ultimate culprit.

The Obama administration did not work hard enough to secure its own goal; as a result, dozens of men had years more of their lives stolen, sometimes suffering brutal forced-feedings as they protested their detention through hunger strikes. Moreover, the Department of Justice under Obama repeatedly appealed habeas rulings, until the habeas process had no meaning; it retained the unjust and unworkable Military Commissions; and it resisted legal efforts to hold individuals who authorized or committed torture to account.

We cannot repeat this policy fiasco and moral disaster. President Biden will have the awesome task of purging the United States of the corruption the Trump administration has visited upon its institutions, norms, and values. But Guantanamo is itself a profound corruption. Its very existence threatens to render meaningless Americas commitment to human rights, the rule of law, and basic ideas of fairness.

Hopefully, Americans will resoundingly elect Biden and Harris to restore decency to the United States. We hope and will make every effort to ensure that closing Guantanamo is an essential part of that effort.

Do what you urgently must in these last days before the election. After celebrating victory, start on the hard work you were put in office to do. Close Guantanamo.

Sincerely,

Witness Against Torture