

PRESS RELEASE

May 29, 2006

Growing Up At Gitmo

By **ADAM ZAGORIN**

The most famous kid at the U.S. detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, is Omar Khadr. A Canadian citizen, he was captured in Afghanistan in 2002 when he was only 15. The U.S. charges that he threw a grenade that killed a U.S. soldier. He faces a murder trial, which his lawyers are resisting, noting that he was a child at the time of the alleged crime. The U.S. has said Khadr was among the few juveniles being held at Guantánamo Bay. But a TIME analysis of data released earlier this month by the Pentagon indicates that Gitmo might have held as many as 24 prisoners under age 18, more than previously known. The real figure could be higher, given imprecise date-of-birth data for some detainees.

Many experts argue that international law, including the Geneva Conventions, requires that child prisoners be separated from adults and receive education while in detention. U.S. federal law has similar requirements and defines a juvenile as under 18. The Pentagon, which classifies only those younger than 16 as juveniles, has never denied that some Gitmo inmates under 18 were not segregated. Many of these youths were subject to the same conditions and interrogations as the adults. Some still at Gitmo have claimed through their lawyers that they have been beaten or abused.

Pentagon spokesman Lieut. Commander Jeffrey Gordon told TIME that no juveniles are currently incarcerated at Gitmo; they have either matured past age 18 behind bars or been freed. Some kids--including three Afghans thought to be 10, 12 and 13 when they arrived--were segregated from adults, allowed to play sports and given lessons. But in many ways, they were viewed as no different from their grownup fellow inmates. In April 2003 General Richard Myers, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the three "may be juveniles but they're not on a Little League team anywhere. They're on a major-league team, and it's a terrorist team, and they're in Guantánamo for a very good reason--for our safety." Soon afterward, the three were released.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14141>

SOURCE: Time

EU: US Must Close Guantanamo

Vienna - The European Union is pressing the United States to close its detention centre at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where alleged "terrorists" have been held and sometimes abused, reported an Austrian news agency on Sunday.

After a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Vienna, Danish foreign minister Per Stig Moeller said the envoys agreed "that the US must take steps as quickly as possible to close the prison".

Sweden's foreign minister, Jan Eliasson, said abuses at Guantanamo were a "continuing cause for concern".

The issue is likely to come up when US President George W Bush visits Vienna for an EU-US summit on June 21.

The US began taking prisoners to the military base in January, 2002.

European leaders have been harshly critical of documented abuses at Guantanamo, and human rights groups, including Amnesty International, have called for the closure of the facility.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14140>

SOURCE: News24.com

Parents of Gitmo Teen Seek Speedy Release

Saeed Al-Abyad, Arab News

JEDDAH, 29 May 2006 — Relatives of the youngest detainee held at Guantanamo Bay have stepped up their efforts to ensure his speedy release after it transpired that his name was not included in a list of Saudi detainees recently released by the US authorities.

Abdul Salam Ghaythan was aged 16 when he was initially detained at the US naval base in Cuba. His relatives are alarmed at how a young teenager could be imprisoned with detainees much older in age, no matter how serious the charges against him may be.

"I have no idea which crime I have committed and why I should be kept in a miserable place such as this," said the Saudi youth in a recent letter sent home through the International Red Cross. In the letter, Ghaythan outlined the loneliness and sorrow he feels at Guantanamo.

According to the boy's uncle, Ghaythan was working at a vegetable market in Riyadh. "There wasn't anything suspicious or unusual in his behavior and dealings with other people. He was a fun-loving kid with plenty of friends and always attracted to voluntary charity work. How he was arrested and sent to Guantanamo is a mystery even to his relatives."

The uncle said that some seven months before war broke out in Afghanistan, Ghaythan left home saying he was traveling to Makkah to perform Umrah. "After not returning for 17 days since leaving Riyadh his parents became worried. A month later they received a telephone call saying he had gone to Afghanistan and that he was fine and hoped to return in a short while," his uncle said.

The relatives were, nevertheless, shocked by the teenager's journey to war-torn Afghanistan and had difficulties understanding how an ordinary peace-loving youth could be lured to a bloody war.

Ghaythan's family explained that as war erupted in Afghanistan after Sept. 11, 2001, the youth made a final telephone call to his parents telling them that he had difficulties leaving the country as all exit points had been severely bombed.

After losing all contact with their son, the Ghaythan family did not know if the Saudi youth was alive or dead. Later it was reported that he was killed and the family began to mourn his death.

As Gitmo detainee names were disclosed by the US authorities, the family were elated to find their son's name included in the list of Saudi captives. Later it also transpired that Abdul Salam was mistaken for a cousin who was killed in Afghanistan.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14139>

SOURCE: Arab News

Major Idiocy

Moazzam Begg's interview at the Hay festival suggested that the war on terror is a byword for surreal incompetence.

John Harris

I thought there were two ways my interview with the sometime Guantanamo inmate Moazzam Begg at the Hay festival yesterday could go: either a forensic, blow-by-blow account of the three horrific years he spent in US Custody - or an attempt to put his experiences in some kind of political/cultural context, and within that, shine light on the utter absurdity of what happened to him. His book, *Enemy Combatant*, does both, but we only had 40 minutes (plus 20 for questions).

So we went for the latter option, and - I hope, anyway - thereby pointed out that key weakness of the Bush administration's supposed war on terror is its almost comical lack of logic, from the policy-makers at the top to the functionaries at the bottom.

Begg's time at Kandahar, Bagram and Guantanamo reflected all this through the prism of everyday experience. He met FBI agents to whom he had to explain the difference between Urdu and Arabic. He was regularly interrogated by people who apparently had no idea that the two Afghan "camps" that he had visited fell outside the writ of either Osama bin Laden and the Taliban (indeed, at least one was destroyed by the latter), and were focused on the conflict in Kashmir. So idiotically reductive was their view of geopolitics that Begg's chosen role as an aid worker was always going to fall on deaf ears: he was resident in Afghanistan to assist with the drilling of wells and set up a charitably-funded school for girls, but Afghanistan, Taliban and al-Qaeda were bywords for the same dreaded thing, and his fate was sealed. (Oh, and before anyone gives it the old "picked up on a battlefield", bear in mind that he was abducted from his temporary family home in Pakistan.)

His choicest memories of being grilled by the US military only compound the sense of surreal incompetence. In the cache on Begg's laptop, they found an image of the Pope, there because it had appeared on the website of the BBC World Service, and became briefly convinced that it suggested a plot to assassinate the pontiff. "If anything happens to the Pope," said an officer Begg nicknamed Major Idiot, "and I find out you were involved, I swear I'll break every finger in your hands. I'm a Catholic." Later on, the same man became convinced of Begg's sinister computer expertise because his prisoner was au fait with the word "Pixilated".

And so the grim comedy went on. On arrival at Guantanamo, he was presented with a six-page confession, which sounded "uninformed an adventurous ... more like the ramblings of a 16 year-old college dropout than what one would expect from the FBI." Months later, there was also crazily imaginative talk of Begg's alleged involvement in a plot to fly unmanned military planes loaded with anthrax into the Houses Of Parliament (a possible centrepiece, perhaps, of the script for an Austin Powers/Die Hard hybrid). While all this went on, there were sporadic visits from MI5 agents, who observed Begg's predicament with a passive detachment, but tried to maintain his spirits via small talk about David Beckham. When Begg was shackled and hooded, one Brit asked his captors "Is all this really necessary?" and then handed Begg a Mars bar.

This is not, of course, to make light of any of the experiences that he suffered. At the core of his book, there is incredible brutality, and the impossibly moving story of a man whose quiet self-sufficiency just about got him through. At Hay, all the people I spoke to were impressed most with his lack of anger, and his refusal to see the world in the Manichean terms of his captors - when one of his more sympathetic guards asked him to one day tell his friends that not all American soldiers were violent hysterics, he replied thus: "I'll tell them that you're not all like that, but you must tell your people that we're not all like that, either."

But still, accompanying the sense of outrage is that underlying impression of a government and military gone surreally mad - which is comic, but also chilling. So, before anyone goes for the usual anti-liberal get your hair cut/wake up/which side are you on stuff, consider this: the responsibility of governments to see to the security of their people is beyond argument. There is undoubtedly a menace out there to which they should be paying the closest attention. But please, read *Enemy Combatant* and ask yourself: from the interrogation room to the upper reaches of government, do the people in charge know what they're doing?

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14136>

SOURCE: The Guardian

May 30, 2006

Three Saudi Ex-Guantanamo Detainees Released on Bail

P.K. Abdul Ghafour, Arab News

JEDDAH, 30 May 2006 — The Interior Ministry announced yesterday that it has released on bail three Saudi Gitmo returnees who arrived in the Kingdom on July 20, 2005 after the court sentenced them to different jail terms.

"The three were transferred to court after they acknowledged that they were present in troubled areas without the permission of their parents or rulers. They had also forged documents and exposed the lives of their family members to danger," a ministry official said.

The court sentenced two of them to one-year jail term while it decided that the period spent by the third in detention was adequate, the official said.

Meanwhile, Interior Minister Prince Naif said yesterday Saudi Arabia would continue its efforts to repatriate the remaining Saudi detainees in the US prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah and Crown Prince Sultan are keen on this issue and we are making intensive efforts with all agencies to ensure their quick return," the Saudi Press Agency quoted the interior minister as saying.

Prince Naif was speaking to reporters in Riyadh after attending a graduation ceremony at the Public Security Training Center. He refused to disclose preliminary results of the investigation of the 15 Gitmo detainees who arrived in Riyadh on May 19, saying, "It is a premature question as we need more time to retrieve important information they have."

Answering another question, Prince Naif emphasized the significant role of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. He said press reports about curbing the organization's powers was a misinterpretation. "They will continue to carry out their duty and the state will provide them with all support," he said.

The minister said the recent decision that brought cases such as harassment of women under the Commission for Investigation and General Prosecution was a procedural measure in line with the requirements of the penal code. In accordance with that decision the role of the virtue commission will be restricted to arresting suspects and handing them over to police.

He said the measure was taken to reduce the burden on the commission officials.

"The investigation commission's officials have gained a high degree of expertise in carrying out investigation as they are also well-versed in Shariah laws. They are equal to their brethren in the virtue commission," he explained.

Naif denounced the smear campaigns against the Saudi government and said: "Saudi Arabia has been implementing Shariah and its constitution is based on the Qur'an and Sunnah."

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14144>

SOURCE: Arab News

75 Now on Hunger Strike at Guantanamo

By **BEN FOX**

Associated Press Writer

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) - The number of Guantanamo Bay detainees participating in a hunger strike has ballooned from three to around 75, the U.S. military said Monday, revealing growing defiance among prisoners held for up to 4 years with no end in sight.

Navy Cmdr. Robert Durand called the hunger strike at the U.S. naval base in southeastern Cuba an "attention-getting" tactic to step up pressure for the inmates' release and said it might be related to a May 18 clash between detainees and guards that injured six prisoners.

"The hunger strike technique is consistent with al-Qaida practice and reflects detainee attempts to elicit media attention to bring international pressure on the United States to release them back to the battlefield," Durand said from Guantanamo Bay.

The United States now holds about 460 people at Guantanamo on suspicion of links to al-Qaida or the Taliban. But human rights groups say innocent people have been sent to the jail.

Defense lawyers said the hunger strike, which began last year, reflects increasing frustration among men who have little contact with the world outside the remote prison.

"I think it is escalating because the people down there are getting more and more desperate," said Bill Goodman, legal director for the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights, which represents many of the detainees. "Obviously, things have reached a crisis point."

The military did not release the names of the striking detainees, and lawyers said they have no way of learning whether their clients are involved until they can visit the base.

"All these men want is a chance to have a trial," said Zachary Katznelson, an attorney for Reprieve, a British human rights group that represents 36 Guantanamo detainees. "If they are guilty, punish them. If not, then send them home."

Only 10 of the prisoners have been charged and face trial before military tribunals. The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to rule in June whether President Bush overstepped his authority in ordering the tribunals.

Durand said the number of hunger strikers reached about 75 over the weekend. U.S. officials classify detainees as being on hunger strike when they have missed nine consecutive meals.

Some 76 detainees began the strike last August to protest their confinement, with their ranks peaking at 131 in the fall, the military has said.

Defense lawyers have accused the military of underreporting the number of hunger strikers.

The lawyers say the number of strikers dwindled to three earlier this year after the military adopted more aggressive measures to force feed them, including using a restraint chair. U.S. officials said the measures are "safe and humane" and have been used in American civilian prisons.

Four of the detainees on hunger strike are being force-fed, including the three who were participating in the protest before the recent increase, Durand said.

Military officials believe the increase in hunger strikers was timed to coincide with the arrival of journalists and lawyers for the next round of pretrial hearings for Guantanamo detainees in June, Durand said.

He added it also could be related to the clash earlier this month in which, according to the military, a detainee pretended to commit suicide to lure guards into a cellblock, where they were attacked by prisoners armed with makeshift weapons.

Earlier that day, two detainees overdosed on antidepressant drugs they collected from other detainees and hoarded in their cells. The men have since regained consciousness.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14143>

SOURCE: The Guardian

May 31, 2006

MP in Visit Bid To Guantanamo

By Bill Jacobs

EAST LANCASHIRE MP Greg Pope wants to visit the controversial Guantanamo Bay detention camp in Cuba in a new embarrassment for Tony Blair.

He is a member of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, which has been strongly critical of the holding of terror suspects without trial in the unofficial prison, and is seeking permission for the US government to see what happens there.

If the all-party group does visit it is likely to step up calls for Guantanamo to be closed. Hyndburn Labour MP Mr Pope said: "I am all in favour of going to Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay.

"I have been a strong critic of the camp. I think it is a disgrace. As part of the war on terror you cannot hold people without trial. It should be closed at once".

While Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells tried to put a brave face on the plan, a trip by British MPs could put increasing pressure on Mr Blair's relationship with US President George W Bush.

Commenting on the proposed visit, Mr Howells said he agreed that there needed to be a "greater understanding" of how the facility operated, adding that the Government's position remained that it would be better if the base was closed.

He said: "I fully agree that there needs to be a greater understanding of how Guantanamo operates.

" A visit, say by the Foreign Affairs Committee of this House, would clearly help to achieve this. I understand that the Foreign Affairs Committee is already in touch with the US administration about visiting the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay."

Dr Howells added: "Our position is clear and consistent. It would be better if Guantanamo were closed. But members should recognise that this is not an easy task and that balancing security and liberty never has been easy."

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14159>

SOURCE: Lancashire Evening Telegraph

Relatives Push For Guantanamo Detainees' Release

By Mariam Al Hakeem, Correspondent

Riyadh: Some 150 relatives of Saudi nationals who have been detained in Guantanamo Bay will meet here tomorrow to discuss ways of getting them released, human rights activists said.

The meeting, the first of its kind, will be held under the auspices of the Saudi Society for Human Rights at its headquarters, said Dr Bandar Al Hujar, president of the society.

Speaking to Gulf News yesterday, Dr Al Hujar said the relatives will make a formal appeal for the release of their kin.

Global conference

Dr Bandar Al Hujar also disclosed plans of the society to hold an international conference as part of drawing attention to the condition of Guantanamo Bay detainees.

The conference will be convened in Riyadh within the next few months. Several international figures working in the human rights field, including heads of major international human rights organisations, will be invited. Dr Bandar Al Hujar also held extensive talks with a visiting British delegation headed by former Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd.

He briefed the delegation on the activities of the society, as well as its major objectives and future plans.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Dr Al Hujar said the society is currently engaged in working out a plan to include human rights as part of the curriculum in Saudi schools and universities.

Meanwhile, the Saudi authorities have released on bail three Saudi Guantanamo Bay returnees who arrived in the kingdom on July 20, last year after the court sentenced them to different jail terms.

Prince Mohammad Bin Naif, assistant interior minister for security affairs received the released detainees and wished them a happy future.

Meanwhile, Interior Minister Prince Naif Bin Abdul Aziz, reiterated the keenness of the Saudi government to secure the release of Saudi detainees in Guantanamo, saying "Intensive efforts are being exerted in this respect and the detainees, with the grace of Almighty Allah, will soon return home."

Prince Naif also denied reports that his recent statement with regard to restricting the activities of the Commission for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (religious police) in arresting nuisance-makers was part of curbing the commission's powers.

Excessive powers

Prince Naif recently warned against the religious police exercising excessive powers in arresting Saudi youths for nuisance-making.

In reply to a question about internet statements with signatures of more than 60 writers alleging Saudi Arabia is not applying Shariah, Prince Naif said: "If these signatories are men of specialisation and aware of the Shariah, then they should realise Saudi Arabia has been implementing the Shariah and its constitution based on the Holy Quran and the Prophet's Sunnah."

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14155>

SOURCE: Gulf News

Swimming in Guantanamo Bay: The Life of a Foreign Correspondent

Presenter: Helena Webb

Leigh Sales has been to New Orleans and to Guantanamo Bay. It's all in a day's work for a foreign correspondent.

Leigh Sales can't imagine what it would be like to have a job where she knew that all day, everyday, she would be sitting in an office. As a foreign correspondent for the ABC, Leigh is used to not knowing what's in store when the phone rings.

Some of Leigh's stories from her four years in Washington are told in Traveller's Tales 2, the new book on foreign correspondents from ABC Books.

She arrived in Washington in December 2001 just as David Hicks was first arrested. Two years later, she saw him for the first time when she and other journalists travelled to Guantanamo Bay to cover the hearings. Transportation was a military plane.

So the material was straining across his back like he was in a straitjacket
The reporters were told to assemble at Richmond Air Force Base in Virginia in the early hours of the morning. It was just like in the movies, says Leigh. Passengers sat in webbing with their backs to the fuselage. The plane wasn't heated and everyone had been told to bring heavy winter jackets.

The toilet was up the back was curtained off with a bit of material. "I vowed I wouldn't drink any water till I got off," laughs Leigh. On arrival they stepped out in 38°C heat.

Leigh agrees that part of the appeal of the job is not knowing what life and work has in store next. Also, for her, part of it is being naturally curious. "I love getting to see things first hand." Ironically, for a journalist, Leigh likes being able to get her information without the media filter and to form her own opinion.

Guantanamo Bay was a disquieting place, says Leigh. "The place is barren and dusty and dry and really physically uncomfortable to be in." It was also psychologically uncomfortable. On the first trip, the journalists were taken through the camps where the detainees were kept. They could not talk to each other but were close enough to make eye contact, says Leigh.

She found herself wondering if the inhabitants were eyeing her because they were murderous terrorists who wanted her dead or if they were people pleading – "Help get me out of here. I'm just a goat farmer from Afghanistan."

"Neither of these scenarios were very comfortable, so it was a strange place to be," says Leigh.

After two years, of filing stories on David Hicks without having met him, Leigh describes her first sight of him as surreal. He was short, she remembers, about 5'2" or 5'3" tall, and wearing a suit. His lawyer told her that the court appearance was the first time David had ever worn a suit. He looked uncomfortable, she says and when he sat down, he didn't undo the buttons on the coat.

discovered a population whose work ethic was so well matched by its after-work ethic
"So the material was straining across his back like he was in a straitjacket." After about an hour, David Hicks's lawyer noticed his discomfort and instructed him to loosen the buttons.

He hadn't shown any emotions when he walked in, says Leigh though that didn't surprise her. Often court participants are told not to show their feelings, she says. He didn't look around until the end, when he sighed and looked for his father. "Getting to see the infamous David Hicks was pretty interesting."

The time at Guantanamo Bay wasn't all work, says Leigh. The Aussies became firm favourites among the assembled international media when they put on a BBQ. That prompted an email from one of the American journalists who wrote that in meeting Australians, he'd never "discovered a population whose work ethic was so well matched by its after-work ethic."

On another occasion, moonlight swimming was in order. The journalists were under tight restrictions but one night, their military liaison officer took pity and escorted them to the swimming beach about 100 metres away from their barracks. Again, found Leigh she couldn't escape the irony of swimming in Guantanamo Bay just metres away from camp of terrorists.

In her four years in the US, Leigh visited 31 states and Canada, Cuba and Mexico. There were times when she was close to home but the phone could ring and she'd have to be off at any time. She remembers when she got the call to go to New Orleans after hurricane Katrina.

You're simply told to take the first available plane, she says. The adrenaline starts, you don't sleep, story angles and approaches are going through your mind. Yet foreign correspondence isn't all glamorous, Leigh warns. There's also the waiting, the security checks, driving, sitting in airports.

Now back in Australia, Leigh can't imagine that she will ever have a job as exciting as that four years in the Washington. But at the same time, she shows that she's not an adrenaline, excitement junkie. Just this week, she says, the foreign editor rang to ask her to go to East Timor. "And my heart sank." After having been home for only a few months, Leigh's quite happy for someone else to go this time.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14162>

SOURCE: ABC.net.au

Cindy Sheehan Condemns Australian Prime Minister as an "Illegal Combatant"

By Richard Phillips

US antiwar activist Cindy Sheehan denounced the Australian government for its participation in the Iraq war and called for the release of David Hicks from Guantánamo Bay and the closure of the notorious US military prison camp at a demonstration in Melbourne last Friday.

Sheehan rejected US and Australian government claims that Guantánamo inmates "did not deserve civil rights" because they were "illegal enemy combatants". The four-and-a-half-year incarceration of Hicks, in violation of Geneva Conventions and his basic legal rights, has been fully endorsed by the Howard government.

"George Bush and John Howard and Tony Blair are illegal combatants," she said, "there's nothing about this war on terror that is legal. These people perpetuate the torture and the killing and they're still allowed to run free and live in society."

The demonstration was one of several antiwar protests and public meetings featuring Sheehan and Dr Salam Ismael, from the Baghdad-based organisation Doctors for Iraq, during an east coast tour of Australia last week.

While the corporate media provided little publicity about Sheehan's visit, the meetings were packed, demonstrating yet again the deep-seated opposition of broad layers of the population to the Iraq war and Australian participation in it.

"The military exists to make the world safe for American corporations"

"The United States had no business invading Iraq, a country that was no threat to America," Cindy Sheehan told a 600-strong meeting at the Seymour Centre in Sydney on Tuesday night. "George Bush lied to me, he lied to my son, he lied to the country and he lied to the world."

Sheehan began campaigning against the war after her 25-year-old son Casey was killed by an Iraqi resistance fighter in April 2004. She is a founding member of the Gold Star Families for Peace, an organisation established by American families who have lost relatives in the Iraq war and are demanding the withdrawal of US troops. She is also a national board member of the Progressive Democrats of America, a left-liberal pressure group that works within the Democratic Party and was associated with the Howard Dean nomination campaign in 2004.

Sheehan became a focus for millions of Americans opposing the war after she established a protest camp outside George W. Bush's Texas ranch in August 2005 to demand a meeting with the US president over the death of her son. Australia is the eighth country she has visited since that vigil.

Sheehan told the meeting that the invasion of Iraq was illegal and was given loud applause when she called for the impeachment of Bush and his prosecution, along with his co-conspirators, on war crime charges.

"In our country the military exists to make the world safe for American corporations and to assist in the spread of corporate colonialism," she said.

"The invasion had nothing to do with fighting terrorism or WMDs but was about controlling their natural resources and stealing their oil. It was about devastating their country so our country's corporations—Haliburton, Bechtel and Blackwater Security and Exxon and KBR—could profit. This is a war crime.

"Another war crime, along with Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, and the other prisons in Iraq, is that my country has used chemical weapons in Iraq," she said. "It has been proven that they used white phosphorus and napalm in Fallujah. Even more than that, using conventional weapons on civilians is a crime against humanity. Going into a country and imposing "regime change", your system of government, is also a war crime.

"Your country supports all this action, which makes your government war criminals, like mine.

"Somebody asked me how do the people of Australia redeem themselves," she continued, "but the people of Australia don't have to redeem themselves. The problem is your government."

A medical disaster

Dr Ismael told the capacity crowd at the Seymour Centre that the invasion of Iraq was an "act of barbarism". Using photographs and statistical charts he described the destruction of basic health service infrastructure since the 2003 invasion and called for the immediate withdrawal of the US-led occupying forces.

Ismael explained that only 45 percent of 900 basic drugs required to maintain adequate medical treatment were available in Iraq and that 40 percent of imported food and medical supplies were not inspected to determine whether they conformed to basic health standards or not. In Iraq today, over 400,000 children are malnourished.

He said that water purification and sanitation plants destroyed in March 2003 had not been repaired and that of the 18 hospitals operating in Baghdad prior to the invasion, 11 had been looted and were dysfunctional. Privatisation of medical services was extensive and basic drug prices had skyrocketed. Antibiotic prices had doubled and medical oxygen increased more than ten-fold since the invasion, he declared.

Prior to the invasion, he continued, hundreds of people from the Middle East came to Iraq for medical treatment in the country's health system. Today, nobody came for medical care. Rather, any Iraqis who could afford it, left the country to have medical procedures carried out elsewhere.

According to Ismael, who has worked in refugee camps and health units throughout Iraq, including in Fallujah, drug supplies were so scarce that in some hospitals surgeons had to carry out amputations using only local anaesthetics. Scores of people had died or been forced to undergo limb amputations because they had been held up on their way to hospital at occupation checkpoints.

Ismael treated casualties of the first siege of Fallujah in April 2004 and was one of the first medical observers to enter the city after a second wave of US attacks in November 2004. He provided a harrowing account of the US military's destruction of Fallujah and its murder of thousands of innocent Iraqi men, women and children.

Fallujah's main hospital was seized by the US troops a few days after the first siege. The only other city clinic was hit twice by American missiles, with medical equipment and drugs destroyed. Ismael said there were no functioning ambulances left in the city. The two ambulance vehicles sent to help evacuate the wounded had been destroyed by US missile fire.

He told the audience that Doctors for Iraq had been the first to present documentary evidence that the US military had used napalm-white phosphorus bombs against civilians.

The Western media had ignored this war crime, he said, because the information about it "came from Iraqis" who were considered "biased". It did not become an issue until later, when Italian journalists took it up.

Ismael said that large numbers of Iraqi doctors and highly qualified surgeons had left the country since the invasion, unable to cope with the impossible state of medical infrastructure and lack of basic drugs. This included more than 3,000 doctors in the past year.

Violations of medical neutrality were now commonplace, he explained, with doctors and surgeons threatened or killed for honouring their Hippocratic oath and treating all sick and wounded, irrespective of their political loyalties or religious beliefs. He said that 15 surgeons had been jailed by the US military for treating patients the US claimed were insurgents.

"I've been accused of this. My house has also been raided and my father beaten up by US military forces," Ismael said.

"Nothing could be worse"

A brief question and answer period followed the speeches by Sheehan and Ismael.

One audience member suggested that withdrawal of the US-led military would "only make things worse".

Ismael briefly replied that the invasion was "an act of barbarism" and that "nothing can be worse for Iraqis than the current situation". The first step in repairing the destruction, he added, was the withdrawal of the occupying forces.

Sheehan said: "I get this question at almost every single Q & A but let's be clear: our government doesn't care about the people of Iraq. The coalition troops are the problem, not the solution, and there is never going to be peace or rebuilding the country of Iraq with our troops and the independent contractors there.

"This area was once the cradle of civilisation. They have doctors, engineers, scientists and other highly trained people. They don't need Americans to solve their problems and to say that they do is arrogant and racist."

During her speech Sheehan did not mention Democratic Party support for the Iraq war or its backing for the Bush administration's police state measures. The following exchange, however, won sustained applause from the Sydney audience.

A local member of Democrats Abroad was given the floor to urge expatriate Americans to register for the forthcoming Senate and Congressional elections.

Sheehan responded: Have you been watching the news? It's easy to vote but that doesn't mean that your vote will be counted.

Democrats Abroad: But if we don't register and get out there and vote, then we can't make a change.

Sheehan: I'm not saying you shouldn't register but what have the Democrats done for us? In the United States there is only one party and it's called the war party. When it comes to war, both parties agree, and the same people who line their pockets and profit from war keep on doing it.

I'm not saying don't vote, that's our right and our responsibility as Americans, but we can't wait until November. People are dying in the hundreds every day in Iraq.... We can't count on our politicians to do the right thing—these people have a track record. Real changes only happen when it comes from the bottom up.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14161>

SOURCE: World Socialist Website

June 01, 2006

Saudi Arabia: Former Guantanamo Prisoners Released from Jail

By Huda al Saleh

Riyadh, Asharq Al-Awsat- Saudi Arabia freed three former Guantanamo Bay detainees who have completed their jail sentences on Tuesday.

Mohammed al Nujeimi, member of the counseling committee, said the release occurred in line with legal requirements, including a pledge by the three men to stay away from problem areas and to accept a weekly follow up with security authorities, as well as full bail payment. The men had arrived in the Kingdom in July last year.

The Saudi authorities have previously released five former detainees after their jail sentences ended and they had undergone counseling, sponsored by the interior ministry. The program aims to re-train former inmates at the US base in Cuba and suspected al Qaeda members.

Fifteen former detainees who returned to Saudi Arabia last month will appear before the counseling committee after medical and psychological tests and the investigation with them are completed, al Nujeimi added.

The interior ministry had offered the first five returnees from Guantanamo Bay financial aid and assistance, with Prince Mohammed bin Naif, assistant to the interior minister for security issues, attending the marriage of one former inmate and presenting him with a car in celebration.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14190>

SOURCE: Asharq Alawsat

Guantanamo Hunger Strike a Publicity Stunt, Says US Military

The World Today

Reporter: Michael Rowland

ELEANOR HALL: Seventy-five detainees at the US detention facility in Cuba are about to mark their first week on a coordinated hunger strike.

The 75 detainees have joined three other prisoners, who've been on a hunger strike since last August and who are now being force-fed.

The US military says the hunger strike, which does not involve Australian David Hicks, is a publicity stunt aimed at increasing pressure on the Bush administration to close the camp.

Guantanamo Bay's Public Affairs Director, Commander Robert Durand spoke to our North America Correspondent Michael Rowland.

ROBERT DURAND: On about Thursday or Friday of last week, about 75 detainees started skipping meals, and by the time Sunday evening/Monday morning came around we had 75 who were... they'd skipped their nine meals and were officially designated as hunger strikers.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: The hunger strike is now nearing a week. What's the health situation of those involved?

ROBERT DURAND: Well, the actual designation as hunger strikers has been a couple of days old, we've... you know, monitoring everyone, we still have the three people who have been on hunger strikes since August of 2005 on enteral feeds, and then we had one additional hunger striker. So we've got four that are going through the enteral feeding.

But we are very closely monitoring the health of the detainees to make sure that they don't endanger their own lives.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: At what point does the military start to try to feed hunger strikers?

ROBERT DURAND: Well, we... our policy is we don't let anyone die on the battlefield as an enemy.

We would pick them up and treat them with the same military and medical care that we would to a US service member, following that general philosophy of, you know, we're not going to let them die on the battlefield, we're not going to let them die in our custody.

We will monitor the weights, monitor the food intake, if any, and the hydration, the electrolyte levels. And based on a medical decision, once the detainees' health is threatened we will then commence enteral feeding, which involves a nasogastric tube, where they receive the proper amount of nutrition, food, and hydration, water.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: And what if the detainee involved tries to refuse that sort of feeding?

ROBERT DURAND: Well, the... we have a restraint system that we use for all detainees. We have three detainees who are receiving enteral feeding.

The reason we use that is because in the past when we attempted to do this many of the detainees would purge their food that they had taken. They would reverse siphon the contents of what they'd fed, so they were denying themselves nutrition.

What it is, is a... it's a padded, very similar to a dentist's chair and the detainee sits in it and is restrained with sort of a Velcro strap. And they are in the restraint system to receive food and hydration long enough for it to get digested, so the entire process takes about two hours for feeding.

MICHAEL ROWLAND: What prompted the hunger strikers to begin their hunger strike when they did, from your point of view?

ROBERT DURAND: Well, we have seen in the past, and we have reason to believe that... current to this time, that the hunger strikes are really an opportunity to take advantage of a window of maximum media attention that is here.

The military commissions are coming back. We have media here on the island quite frequently, but there will be more in the coming weeks. So we see it as a short-term sympathetic hunger strike that is designed to elicit pressure on the United States to release the enemy combatants back to the battlefield.

ELEANOR HALL: Commander Robert Durand, the Public Affairs Director of Guantanamo Bay Detention Center, speaking to our North America Correspondent Michael Rowland.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14187>

SOURCE: ABC.net.au

Euro MP's Prison Camp Call

By Bolton Evening News Reporter

A BOLTON Euro MP has called for a timetable for closure for Guantanamo Bay Prison Camp.

Labour Euro MP, Arlene McCarthy, visited Guantanamo Bay in Cuba last week.

She intends to raise the issue in the European Parliament in Brussels today.

Mrs McCarthy said that since her return from Guantanamo she is more convinced than ever that the best strategy for tackling terrorism is to invest in a co-ordinated approach, based on the rule of law and respect for international conventions, in particular the right to a fair trial.

She said: "All military efforts to prove that detainees are well treated does not override the real injustice of this camp, the existence of which has been described by our Attorney General as unacceptable.

"If we abandon our democratic beliefs in the principles of freedom, justice and a fair trial, then terrorists will have succeeded in undermining our core values. President Bush has indicated he would like to see the end of Guantanamo, and Condoleezza Rice insists America does not want to be "the world's jailer".

"The US must now bring forward a timetable for the closure of Guantanamo. Instead of spending \$34m on a new Camp 6 facility, resources should be invested in strengthening anti-terrorist legislation and intelligence networks, which can detect, disrupt and destroy terrorist activity."

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14180>

SOURCE: Thisislancashire.co.uk

Juma's Father Dies in Saudi

By KANWAL TARIQ HAMEED

THE father of a Bahraini detainee at Guantanamo Bay was buried in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, yesterday without fulfilling his dying wish - to be reunited with the son he had not seen for five years. Mohammed Abdullatif Al Dossary, father of detainee Juma Al Dossary, 32, died on Tuesday night after being admitted to hospital complaining of shortness of breath earlier in the day.

Mr Al Dossary had reportedly been suffering from ill health because of complications following surgery to treat cancer of the larynx and was admitted into intensive care in October last year.

Juma - who has attempted suicide 13 times during his detention according to his lawyers - does not know that his father is dead and his brother says he is worried about what will happen when he does find out.

Mr Al Dossary's family sent out a plea for the Bahrain government to secure his son's release and make their "dying father's dream" come true soon after he was admitted to hospital.

However, he was buried by his family in a Dammam cemetery while his son remained behind bars at the US military base in Cuba.

"He was hoping to see Juma before he died, but he died without seeing his son," Juma's grief-stricken brother Khalid told the GDN.

"Now I'm worried about Juma over there, if he finds out.

"We brought him to the hospital in the morning because he was complaining of shortness of breath, he couldn't breathe well."

Mr Al Dossary had been in and out of hospital since October and fully expected to leave the hospital yesterday, said Khalid.

"We did not expect this at all - he was doing okay," he added.

"Before I left the hospital he told me that he wanted to go home and I said: 'OK, I will have you discharged in the morning'.

"I left the hospital at around 8.15pm and we got a call from the hospital at around 9.30pm saying he had died.

"My mother has diabetes and hypertension, but she will not eat anything - right now my sisters are with her looking after her.

"The last time he saw Juma was five years ago - when he (Juma) came back from the US he stayed with my father before he went to take care of the charity stuff in Afghanistan."

Juma has claimed he was paid to travel to Afghanistan and inspect seven mosques and schools commissioned by Dammam-based Imam Sheikh Mohammed Agelan.

He was captured while attempting to flee Afghanistan after the US-led war started in 2001 and reportedly told a Guantanamo Bay Administrative Review Board (ARB) that he would not leave his house "for the next 75 years" if released.

"Juma said again and again in his letters to my dad: 'I will come back to you and I will serve you the best I can'," said Khalid.

"But now it's too late - it's too late."

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14174>

SOURCE: Gulf Daily News

Eight Pakistanis To Be Released Soon From Guantanamo - Minister

ISLAMABAD, June 1 (KUNA) -- Federal Interior Minister, Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao, Thursday said that the United States has agreed to release eight more Pakistanis detained at Guantanamo Bay prison. He talking to Pakistan Television (PTV) said about 29 Pakistanis were imprisoned at Guantanamo, and efforts were underway to bring back the remaining 21 detenus as well.

A source in the interior ministry told KUNA that the prisoners would be released in the next two weeks.

Earlier, the Minister said that about 35 Pakistanis were still languishing in US-controlled Guantanamo Bay jail, where alleged terrorists and Al Qaeda members are detained.

However, he added, the US authorities had provided Pakistan the list of 29 Pakistanis detained in Guantanamo Bay.

He said a delegation of the foreign office would visit Guantanamo Bay to get complete information about detained Pakistanis so that they could be released.

About 67 Pakistanis had returned from Guantanamo Bay.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14173>

SOURCE: Kuna.net

EU Urges US To End 'Anomaly' of Guantanamo

By Lucia Kubosova

EUOBSERVER / BRUSSELS - The EU has appealed to Washington to close its Guantanamo prison for terror suspects, with the Austrian presidency referring to it as an "anomaly" which should be stopped "as soon as possible."

"Guantanamo is an anomaly. Therefore, from our point of view, the US must take measures to close the camp as soon as possible," said Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik in a statement delivered before the European Parliament on Wednesday (31 May).

Mrs Plassnik spoke on behalf of all EU member states, following several attempts by EU ministers the past few months to agree on such a declaration.

The Austrian foreign minister spoke out against the legal vacuum created by the detention of suspects at the Cuban naval base, stressing "human rights must be respected in this fight against terror."

The statement was welcomed by most political groups in the parliament, with several deputies urging Vienna to raise the issue at the EU-US summit in June - set to be attended by US president George W Bush.

MEPs suggested Washington should either release prisoners where there is no evidence against them or try them under international law.

Around 500 prisoners are currently kept at the Guantanamo prison, four years after the first suspects of links with Al Qaida or the Taleban, were brought in.

"How many more reports do we have to read about gross violations of human rights? The latest one from the Committee Against Torture makes the point again: that torture techniques, which should be abhorrent to any decent person, are still being used," said a British Liberal MEP Elizabeth Lynne.

But the German conservative chair of the parliament's foreign committee Elmar Brok, who visited the camp with an MEPs' delegation earlier this month, said the US has made some genuine effort to improve living conditions at the prison.

His Irish fellow member of the centre-right EPP-ED group Simon Coveney said the findings of the MEPs Guantanamo mission should be reflected in a planned European Parliament resolution and announced he would ask for a delay of the vote until June.

The current text of the resolution, backed by most political groups apart from the biggest EPP-ED faction, calls on the US to implement the UN recommendations immediately and stop all 'special interrogation techniques', including methods involving sexual humiliation, 'water boarding', 'short shackling' and using dogs to induce fear.

The parliament will decide whether to vote on the resolution or postpone it on Thursday (1 June).

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14168>

SOURCE: EUObserver.com

Analysis: Turkish Guantanamo Detainee May Be Freed

By UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

BERLIN -- Turkish-German Murat Kurnaz, called the "Bremen Taliban," remains detained in the U.S-run military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. His lawyers hope for his release before President Bush makes his way to Germany in July, and they may have good reasons to be optimistic.

Bush and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who took office late last year, have hit it off -- diplomatically at least -- during the German's two visits to Washington this year. Bush is looking for allies in Europe to support his fragile foreign policy campaign, and Berlin appears stronger than ever to lend -- if nothing at all -- moral support.

That support could slip away if Kurnaz' future remains in limbo when Bush visits Germany in July. His trip to Merkel's home state of Mecklenburg Western-Pomerania, where Merkel wants Bush to experience how life has changed since the era of former communist East Germany, could easily be overshadowed by less-than-positive headlines mentioning Kurnaz' ongoing four-year detention in a Gulag-style prison.

"If political reasoning would be the benchmark, then he should be freed," Kurnaz' German lawyer, Bernhard Docke, told United Press International on Wednesday.

Kurnaz' involuntary journey to Guantanamo began late 2001 in Pakistan, where the then 19-year-old was on a "pilgrimage," according to Docke, visiting several mosques and Muslim schools. After a little over a month, he was picked off a bus by Pakistani police, who turned him over to the U.S. military.

Kurnaz at the time was believed of be associated with 9/11 hijacker Mohammed Atta, the leader of the Hamburg al-Qaida cell. Though no link was found, Kurnaz spent the next weeks in a prison in Kandahar, Afghanistan, "where he endured repeated torture and brutal treatment," Baher Azmy, Kurnaz' U.S. lawyer, told UPI late last year. In March 2002, Kurnaz was transferred to Guantanamo, where he has remained ever since.

During her first visit to Washington in January, Merkel has pleaded the case of Kurnaz, who has been deemed innocent by a U.S. court. Although it slipped by the press, Merkel again mentioned Kurnaz during her second visit to the White House earlier this month, Docke said.

While similar advances by the previous administration were met with silence, it looked like Merkel had a good chance to get the case going.

Soon after negotiations started in January, Docke told UPI that for the first time, "there is real movement in this case. We are hearing from informed circles that there is a good chance for a release."

Last month, the German news magazine Focus wrote Kurnaz, who has been held as a terror suspect at

Guantanamo for over four years, may be released "within a week." According to the report, Germany's ambassador to the U.S., Klaus Scharioth, and U.S. National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley reached agreements over the case.

A month later, there is no news from Kurnaz, but from his German and U.S. lawyers.

"The length of the negotiations is strange and it annoying," Docke said, adding that the negotiation at the moment was stalled by U.S. demands regulating Kurnaz' life in Germany, some of which -- like ongoing surveillance -- are incompatible with German law.

"I think much has to do with Washington wanting to save its face," he said. "After all, U.S. and German officials as early as four years ago concluded that Murat Kurnaz is innocent."

Azmy was able to visit Kurnaz in April only because of repeated pressure, after military officials had told him in February Kurnaz didn't want to see him, a claim that later proved to be "a lie," Azmy said Wednesday.

"I had been a bit concerned, but it turned out Murat was happy to see me and that he didn't even know I tried to visit him in February," Azmy told UPI in a telephone interview. "He even laughed at me for believing the U.S. military."

Azmy added Kurnaz, whom he calls a "true" and "honest" man, is "very hopeful to return home."

In an article written for German weekly Die Zeit, which will hit the newsstands Thursday, Azmy describes the living conditions, the look and the

mindset of Kurnaz, classified an enemy combatant and the last remaining of six Turks originally detained in Guantanamo.

His is the plight of a man trapped between two countries: Born in Germany to Turkish parents, Kurnaz grew up in the northern German city of Bremen but remains a Turkish national. Upon calls for help, both countries had always referred to the other government. It took years -- and Merkel's commitment -- until Ankara and Berlin worked together for his release.

Kurnaz now wears a long beard as a symbol of his seemingly endless detainment and has become increasingly religious due to solitary confinement and "brutal and inhumane" treatment, Azmy said.

"I warned Kurnaz that his beard could shock the Germans," Azmy writes. "Kurnaz answered: 'If they are so afraid of long-bearded men, why don't they call Santa Claus a terrorist?'"

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14188>

SOURCE: World Peace Herald

June 02, 2006

Guantanamo Hunger Strike Up To 89

More Guantanamo Bay detainees have joined a hunger strike, raising the total to 89, the US military says.

The strike - which last weekend jumped from three participants to 75 - is now at its biggest point this year at the US prison on Cuba, where about 460 men are being held on suspicion of links to al-Qaida or the Taliban.

The US military on Thursday said the detainees were trying to pressure the United States to release them, but a human rights attorney described the strike as a desperate appeal for justice.

Six of those were being force-fed through tubes pushed into their stomachs via their noses, including three who had refused food since August, said Navy Cmdr. Robert Durand.

"All are being closely monitored by the ... medical staff and being counselled on the health effects of long-term hunger striking," Durand said in a statement from Guantanamo Bay.

Military officials said the hunger strikers are trying to gain public sympathy to pressure the United States to release them.

Call for help

Ben Wizner, an American Civil Liberties Union attorney who has been to Guantanamo Bay, said the growing hunger strike appears more like a call for help by detainees.

"The vast majority have never been charged with any crime, and have been prevented from communicating directly with the outside world," Wizner said in a telephone interview from New York. "So it may well be their attempt to ensure that the world is reminded of their unlawful detention."

A UN panel said on May 19 that holding detainees indefinitely at Guantanamo Bay violates the world's ban on torture. The panel said the United States should close the detention center.

Only 10 Guantanamo detainees have been charged with crimes.

The hunger strike comes amid increasing displays of defiance from the prisoners, who have been held for up to four and a half years, with many claiming their innocence.

On May 18, a detainee staged a suicide attempt to lure guards into a cellblock, where they were attacked by prisoners armed with makeshift weapons, the military said.

Detention camp officials have called the hunger strikes an attempt by the prisoners to gain media attention, to protest their indefinite detention and to put pressure on the United States to release them.

Their lawyers say it is a sign of despair

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14196>

SOURCE: AlJazeera, Reuters

June 03, 2006

Hicks Letter Welcomed

From: AAP By Xavier La Canna

THE father of Australian Guantanamo Bay detainee David Hicks has welcomed an open letter to Prime Minister John Howard which argues the US detention of his son is illegal, but said he doubts it will make a difference to the Federal Government.

The letter, with 76 signatories including four former Supreme and Federal Court judges, demands a fair trial for Hicks. It was penned by the president of the Australian section of the International Commission of Jurists, John Dowd QC, and published today in the Weekend Australian newspaper.

"As Australian lawyers we wish to bring it to your attention that the imprisonment of David Hicks at Guantanamo Bay and his proposed trial by a US Military Commission are illegal under international law," the letter said.

"The imprisonment at Guantanamo Bay and the unfair trial of Hicks by military commission are an affront to international legal standards, indeed all civilised standards."

It said principles of human dignity and respect for human rights were the shared heritage of the civilised world, and after being imprisoned for four-and-a-half years David Hicks had been denied the right to an expeditious trial.

Hicks' father Terry Hicks said today he doubted the letter would change the minds of Mr Howard or Attorney-General Philip Ruddock.

"I would like to think the Government will look at it and do something, but Mr Ruddock is really onside with the commissions," he said to AAP.

"I think if you had 50,000 signatories he (Mr Ruddock) still wouldn't change his views."

He said the prime minister had listened to Australians when he changed his position on the sale of Snowy Hydro, but would not listen to public opinion on the incarceration of his son.

Mr Hicks said the detention was illegal, and the tribunal system was unfair and should be scrapped.

"I believe these commissions were set up to find these people guilty," he said, adding he believed his son was being used as a "token white man" to prove the system was not racist.

"He would have been better off being treated as a prisoner of war."

The letter argued that by failing to condemn the violations of law, Australia was complicit in undermining international legal order.

"The menace of terrorism is real," the letter stated. "However, to meet the danger the world needs not only a military solution, but also renewed and sustainable commitment to the rule of law and to fundamental principles of human dignity and human rights."

Among the signatories are former Federal Court judge Ron Merkel and the president of Liberty Victoria, Brian Walters SC.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14217>

SOURCE: News.com.au

Guantanamo Prison Closure Would Help War On Terror, Says UK MP

Labor MP Diane Abbott is calling on the British government to facilitate a parliamentary visit to Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba, arguing that the closure of the US concentration camp would help the war on terror.

"We need to demonstrate that when we talk about civil liberties, freedom and enduring international values, it is not just talk but something that we mean," said Abbott, who is a previous member of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Last week in parliament, the backbench MP said that there had been 'important benchmarks' set by the UN Committee Against Torture concluding that the conditions in the camp constitute torture and the UK attorney general calling for its closure.

"The attorney general is not the only person who has called for the closure of Guantanamo. The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has called for that, as have Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch," she said.

Abbott, who is Britain's only Black woman MP, said that the US cannot have it both ways in saying they are holding people indefinitely without trial or charge because they are at war and refuse to accept that the Geneva Convention applies.

She also called on the UK government to do more for British residents still held in Guantanamo, saying that although it is not normal consular practice, 'it is also not the practice of Britain to stand on the side while people are undergoing torture'.

Prime Minister Tony Blair has yet to go as far as the government's attorney general in calling for the closure of the internment camp, referring instead to call it an 'anomaly'.

But the Labor MP said that Blair should take advantage of his special relationship with US President George W. Bush to raise the issue 'in more emphatic and public terms than he has hitherto'.

"There is much more that our Government and Prime Minister can do to close down Guantanamo once and for all. That would represent an advance in the war against terror," she said.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14216>

SOURCE: IRNA.ir

Open Letter Demands Fair Trial For Hicks

A group of Australian lawyers has written an open letter to Prime Minister John Howard arguing that the US detention of David Hicks at Guantanamo Bay is illegal.

The letter, with 76 signatories including four former Supreme and Federal Court judges, also demands a fair trial for Hicks.

The Weekend Australian newspaper reports the letter argues that the federal government is complicit with the US in breaking international law and says Mr Howard must act or he will lose the war on terrorism.

"The menace of terrorism is real," the newspaper quotes the letter as saying.

"However, to meet the danger the world needs not only a military solution, but also renewed and sustainable commitment to the rule of law and to fundamental principles of human dignity and human rights."

Among the signatories are former Federal Court judge Ron Merkel and former NSW Liberal attorney-general John Dowd.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14211>

SOURCE: Sydney Morning Herald

June 04, 2006

Spanish Judge Calls for Closing U.S. Prison at Guantánamo

By ELAINE SCIOLINO

FLORENCE, Italy — Invoking Spain's history of dictatorship and terror, Baltasar Garzón, the country's most prominent investigative magistrate, has called on the United States to immediately close the detention center at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

"A model like Guantánamo is an insult to countries that respect laws," Judge Garzón said in an interview during a counterterrorism conference in Florence in late May. "It delegitimizes us. It is a place that needs to disappear immediately."

As the war in Iraq drags on, criticism in Europe of the Bush administration's prison for terrorist suspects as well as its secret transport of terrorist suspects to third countries has steadily mounted. The criticism reflects both concern among Europeans that the United States has abandoned its core values and a widespread anti-Americanism among Europe's Muslim population.

In a speech last month, Britain's attorney general, Lord Goldsmith, called on the United States to close Guantánamo, saying, "The historic tradition of the U.S. as a beacon of freedom, liberty and justice deserves the removal of this symbol."

Judge Garzón, speaking out on the issue for the first time, went further. "I have as much interest as you do in wanting the problem of terrorism to be resolved," he said, recalling the deadly train bombings in Madrid in 2004. "But if we continue along these lines, we are on the road to committing crimes against humanity. And it will move from the people who perpetrated the crimes to the people who authorized them."

The Bush administration argues that such practices as the indefinite detention of prisoners without charge at Guantánamo and the secret transfer, or rendition, of suspects for interrogation by other governments are justified under laws of armed conflict.

Judge Garzón, who has spent nearly two decades investigating and building criminal cases against terrorist networks in Spain, underscored his point by citing his own country's dark past. Only in the last few years has Spain begun to confront the terror of the 1936 army uprising and civil war that brought Gen. Francisco Franco to power and ushered in four decades of dictatorship.

"In Spain, we also practiced torture and the forced disappearance of people," he said. "When the temptation came, we succumbed to it."

Even under democratic rule in the 1980's, Judge Garzón said, a clandestine war was carried out against the Basque separatist group ETA — many suggest by security forces — which included ill treatment and torture of prisoners, kidnappings and killings.

He also recalled the far more distant history of his country. "I come from the country of the Inquisition, when people were told, 'If you cooperate, we'll cut your head off, and if you don't, we'll burn you alive,' " he said. "We had to learn from experience that torture, and mistreatment and degradation, do not work as investigation techniques."

Judge Garzón's frustrations with the United States' approach to prosecuting terrorism was shared by some of his European counterparts at the conference. So was the sense that such frustrations come from sad national experience.

"We in Italy knew fascism for many years," said Armando Spataro, Italy's best-known investigating magistrate, in an interview. "We know it's a great mistake to fight terrorism in this way, the way of Guantánamo, the way of renditions. It's extremely damaging to all our efforts to integrate our Muslim communities who see these practices as unjust."

Judge Spataro has opened a criminal case in Milan against 22 people allegedly linked to the Central Intelligence Agency who have been charged with the abduction of a Muslim cleric from a Milan street in 2003 as part of a counterterrorist rendition operation. Last month the Milan judge announced that he intended to try them in absentia this year.

In remarks made during the conference itself, sponsored by New York University law school's Center on Law and Security, Judge Garzón cited his own experience with what he called the failure of the Guantánamo system. The United States held Hamed Abderrahman Ahmed, a Spanish citizen who had trained at a Qaeda camp in Afghanistan, there for two years before granting Judge Garzón's request to extradite him to Spain. He was eventually sentenced to six years in prison for membership in a terrorist group — but not with the help of any evidence built at Guantánamo.

"Everything obtained from there was useless because it went against the rules," Judge Garzón said.

A second suspect returned to Spain last year is in custody awaiting trial. The judge said he had received no response regarding two other suspects sought by Spain.

Judge Garzón agreed that his remarks at the off-the-record conference could be cited for quotation.

He also faulted the United States for withholding information on the fate of Mustafa Setmariam Nasar. Mr. Nasar, an important jihad theorist also known as Abu Musab al-Suri, is wanted in connection with the Madrid terrorist train attacks in March 2003.

News reports since late last year have cited unidentified American and Pakistani officials as saying that Mr. Nasar was seized in Pakistan and turned over to American authorities.

"I don't know where he is," Judge Garzón said. "Nobody knows where he is. Can you tell me how this helps the struggle against terrorism?"

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14229>

SOURCE: New York Times

Rights Group To Ask Bush To Free Saudi Detainees

By Mariam Al Hakeem, Correspondent

Riyadh: The Saudi Society for Human Rights will formally ask United States President George Bush to release the remaining Saudi detainees from the Guantanamo Bay prison and close the notorious detention centre.

The decision was taken at a joint meeting of the relatives of the detainees and the members of the society.

The meeting was held on Thursday at the headquarters of the society as part of the ongoing move to have the Saudi detainees released. Lawyers representing the detainees were also present.

The meeting, the first of its kind, has agreed to lodge a formal petition with the US president appealing to take urgent steps to set free the remaining Saudi detainees.

The relatives have authorised the society to present the memorandum to the US embassy in Riyadh in order to forward it to President Bush.

As part of the pressure tactics to get the detainees released, the meeting agreed to convene an international human rights conference in Riyadh soon to draw attention to the condition of the Guantanamo detainees and intensify efforts for their release.

Several prominent international human rights activists and representatives of human rights organisations will be invited to attend the conference.

"Efforts will also continue to secure permission from the US Administration to allow members of the society and relatives to visit the detainees," a source at the society said.

Meanwhile, one of the 15 Saudi detainees who was released recently from Guantanamo, said he had been subjected to inhuman torture and abuse in prison.

"A young Saudi man was stripped and cold water poured on him continuously besides an Israeli flag was thrown at him while he was verbally abused," a relative of the detainee said.

The team of lawyers, who was appearing for the detainees, has been disbanded and a new team was appointed under the umbrella of the Saudi Society for Human Rights.

Four local lawyers were removed from the new team. The new team comprises of Dr Bandar Al Hujar, President of the society, Dr Mufleh Al Qah'tani, Deputy president of the society, Abdul Aziz Al Sabeel, Mohammad Al Oushin, Abdullah Al Juaid, Abdul Aziz Al Rubaish, Abdullah Al Qah'tani, Talal Al Zahrani, Abdullah Al Subaie, Abdul Wahab Mousa, Ahmad Mudhar and Kateb Al Shamri.

Relatives of the detainees lodged several complaints against some of the lawyers in the dissolved team, alleging that they had done nothing to plead strongly for their clients.

Representing families of 55 detainees, Abdullah Al Qah'tani said that a group of lawyers presented the families with false telephone numbers to contact the detainees. "Some of these telephone numbers were of restaurants and cafeterias," he said.

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14227>

SOURCE: Gulf News

David Hicks — Still Detained

Dale Mills

The Australian government is coming under increasing domestic and international pressure to intervene in the imprisonment of David Hicks at the United States' military detention facility at Guantanamo Bay. Hicks has now been held there for four and a half years.

Long held without charge, Hicks has now been formally accused of "conspiracy to commit war crimes", "attempted murder" and "aiding the enemy". Unlike normal criminal charges, no details have been released so it is not clear what "war crimes" he is being charged with, how he was aiding an enemy or who he attempted to murder.

Although some Guantanamo prisoners have been released without charge and repatriated to their home countries, about 660 men are still imprisoned in the facility, and there appears to have been a recent sharp escalation in disturbances there.

On May 18, two men attempted suicide by overdosing on stockpiled medication. This took to 25 the number of prisoners who have attempted suicide.

On May 20, riots broke out, followed by more men joining the hunger strike started by several prisoners in August. By May 30, 75 men were on hunger strike. The original hunger strikers are being force-fed using a naso-gastric tube.

The Australian government's refusal to make representations for the Hicks' return to Australia prompted Amnesty International to call on the UK government to grant Hicks UK citizenship (his mother is a UK citizen).

The UK government argues that Guantanamo Bay should be closed immediately and has succeeded in gaining the release of all UK citizens held there. However, it recently appealed, unsuccessfully, against a ruling that granted Hicks UK citizenship. Amnesty International's Irene Khan commented: "We think that instead of challenging David Hicks' entitlement to British citizenship, the British government should seek either his prosecution under fair trial standards or his release."

PM John Howard has blamed Hicks for his continued detention, saying that he authored his own misfortune when he challenged the legality of the US military commissions in the US courts. Hicks is arguing that he is, under the US Constitution, entitled to a trial, rather than being judged by a military commission, which falls far short of traditional notions of due process.

Australian Law Council president John North says that Hicks was simply exploring all avenues open to him. "It is perfectly understandable that Hicks sought access to the US court system as an alternative to a military commission", he said. "It has been the US authorities, under no pressure from Australian authorities, who have presided over the drawn-out process designed to avoid real judicial scrutiny of the disgrace that is Guantanamo Bay."

The US government's recent "opening up" of the prison camp to outside scrutiny, intended to reduce criticism of it, has already backfired. A delegation of European MPs and US representatives who visited Guantanamo Bay on May 22 were forbidden from speaking with detainees, which they later said rendered their visit practically useless.

Meanwhile, the war on terror abroad means that civil liberties diminish at home. According to a May 24 AFP report, prominent lawyer Lex Lasry QC, in a speech to the Melbourne University Law School, said that the National Security Information Act 2004 made it harder to get a fair trial by allowing the government to withhold information from the defence for "national security" reasons. He pointed out that the withholding of evidence cannot be challenged in any court.

The removal of judicial scrutiny is a more general feature of the so-called war on terror. Guantanamo is subject to neither Cuban nor US law, although this is now being challenged in the US courts. As High Court Justice Michael Kirby put it at a May 22 meeting at Sydney University, Guantanamo is like a legal "black hole".

<http://www.cageprisoners.com/articles.php?id=14224>

SOURCE: Green Left