

Anti-Torture and Anti-Racist Activists Stand Trial for Senate Protest. “The US Government is Guilty of Crimes”

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Witness Torture

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On June 22 and June 25, members of Witness Against Torture (WAT) will defend themselves in two separate trials in Washington, D.C. Superior Court against charges stemming from their demand of accountability for torture and domestic police violence.

On January 12, 2015, eleven people were arrested in the US Senate Gallery after insisting that the Senate launch criminal investigations of US torture, as detailed in the Senate’s own report. That same day, ten people were arrested in the US Capitol Visitor Center after unfurling banners with such slogans as “We Demand Accountability for Torture and Police Murder!”

The trials will take place at DC Superior Court, 500 Indiana Avenue, Washington, D.C., NW. The Senate Gallery trial will begin at 9:30 am on Monday, June 22. The Capital Visitor Center trial will begin at 2:00 pm on Thursday, June 25. Each trial is expected to last one to two days.

The protests in the Capitol followed the release of the Senate’s report on the CIA’s use of torture, including waterboarding, prolonged stress positions, and “rectal feeding.” They also took place against the backdrop of grand juries’ refusal to indict police officers who killed young black men, and in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The defendants will argue that the government itself is guilty of crimes and of failing to enforce its own laws. They claim that they exercised their right of free speech in calling for justice.

The message of the gallery protest was “U.S. Torture: It’s official! Prosecute now!” “There has to be accountability for government misconduct,” contends Bob Cooke, a WAT member from Washington, D.C. arrested in the Gallery. “It’s not enough for Congress to ban torture in the future. Past crimes must be addressed as well.” “We are ordinary citizens who have for years pursued countless avenues in an attempt to get the proper authorities to prosecute those individuals who committed torture in our name,” says Ohio’s Josie Setzler, also arrested in the Gallery. “The Senate needed to hear from us.”

In the Capitol Visitor Center, the protesters drew parallels between the abuse of detainees overseas and state violence against people of color here at home. “The CIA, US military, and political leaders get away with the torture of Muslim men, just like police get away with the killing of African American men,” says Beth Brockman, a WAT member from North

Carolina arrested in the Visitor Center. “Both reflect the racism of our system and must stop.”

The protests came the day after activists from around the country marked the 13th anniversary of the opening of the US detention facility at Guantánamo Bay with a demonstration in Washington.

Witness Against Torture was formed in 2005 with the goal of shutting down the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo Bay and ending US torture. It now addresses state violence more broadly, including the persecution of people of color by police and in US prisons and jails.

www.witnesstorture.org

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