

Guantánamo Hunger Strike. “Day of Action to Close Guantánamo & End Indefinite Detention”

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WitnessTorture.org

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As Guantánamo Hunger Strike Continues, Activists Rally Nationwide for “Day of Action to Close Guantánamo & End Indefinite Detention”

Protests in D.C., NYC, Chicago , San Francisco , and Over 26 Cities Pressure Obama to Close the Prison

April 11, 2013, New York and Washington, D.C. – As the hunger strike of men detained at the U.S. prison at Guantánamo began its third month, activists organized emergency rallies in over 26 cities and 19 states across the United States for a national “Day of Action to Close Guantánamo & End Indefinite Detention.” From New York City to San Francisco, Durham to Los Angeles, Witness Against Torture, Amnesty International, the Center for Constitutional Rights, World Can’t Wait, and other groups demanded the closure of Guantánamo. The actions came on a day that 25 prominent human rights and civil liberties organizations sent [a joint letter](#) to President Obama urging the closure of Guantánamo.

Said organizers of the protests, “The vast majority of the 166 men still trapped at Guantánamo have been held for more than 11 years without charge or fair trial. The Obama administration must take swift measures to humanely address the immediate causes of the hunger strike and fulfill its promise to close the Guantánamo detention facility.”

The coalition urged President Obama to fulfill his promise to close Guantánamo and called on him to:

- Direct Secretary of Defense Charles Hagel to use his authority to issue the certifications or national security waivers required by the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA 2013) to effect transfers from Guantánamo;
- Appoint an individual within the White House to lead the effort to close Guantánamo;
- Make the case to Congress and the American people for removing the remaining transfer restrictions and closing the detention facility; and
- Ensure that all detained men are either charged and fairly tried in criminal court, or released to countries that will respect their human rights.

Demonstrations took place across the country, all accompanied by activists dressed in

orange jumpsuits to represent the men detained at Guantánamo. In Washington , D.C. , activists and speakers, including Pratap Chaterjee from the Board of Directors of Amnesty International USA, rallied in front of the White House. In New York , activists rallied in Times Square where speakers included Pardiss Kebriaei, Senior Staff Attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights, who just returned from visiting clients detained at Guantánamo, and Rachel Ward, Director of US Programs for Amnesty International USA.

Pardiss Kebriaei, Center for Constitutional Rights Senior Attorney, said, “I have just returned from visiting my clients at Guantánamo, and the situation there is dire. The immediate emergency, triggered by searches of the men’s Qur’ans, never should have happened given the long history of Qur’an desecration and religious abuse at the prison. But there is another emergency that is about the indefinite detention of men who will never be charged, more than half of whom have been approved for transfer. One of my clients said to me, ‘The silence of the government is what is killing us.’ It should not take another man dying for the Obama administration to realize that it cannot afford to continue wasting time by laying blame on Congress and justifying its own inaction in closing the prison. If ever there were a time to act, it is now.”

Zeke Johnson, Director of Amnesty International USA’s Security with Human Rights Campaign, said, “Death shouldn’t be the only way out of Guantánamo. The men must either be charged and fairly tried in federal court, or be released.” In response to the hunger strikes he added, “There are even detainees cleared to leave that remain stuck in limbo – people like Shaker Aamer, cleared under both President Bush and President Obama, and whom the UK government wants released. It’s time for President Obama to get serious about closing the detention facility. Even with the Congressional restrictions on transfers, detainees can still be moved out under the certification process and the waiver provision that Congress put in place.”

Jeremy Varon, of Witness Against Torture, said: “The hunger strike at Guantánamo is the latest, tragic reminder that Guantánamo must close. Keeping men there indefinitely without charge or trial, even when they are deemed no threat by the US government itself is morally unacceptable and politically unsustainable. The Guantánamo nightmare must end now.”

For a complete list of the day’s events, see www.witnesstorture.org/events.

To learn more about the hunger strike, see <http://bit.ly/GTMOHungerStrikeAction>.

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