

In “Historic Stand” Against Injustice, Uruguay Welcomes Six Guantanamo Detainees

Move marks "step toward ending longstanding injustice"

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Six men held at Guantanamo were released to Uruguay Sunday, but 136 men still remain. (Photo: Justin Norman/flickr)

Six men held at Guantanamo Bay were [released](#) to Uruguay Sunday after a dozen years languishing at the offshore prison without charge.

The release of the four Syrians, one Tunisian and one Palestinian to the Latin American nation follows months of delay.

Uruguay’s leftist President Jose Mujica, himself a former prisoner, has previously called the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay a “disgrace.”

The *Washington Post* reports that on Friday, Mujica’s office sent an open letter to President Obama to repeat his country’s willingness to accept the men, stating: “We have offered our hospitality for human beings who suffered an atrocious kidnapping in Guantanamo.”

Mujica [said](#) earlier this year that the men would be treated as refugees and would be able to travel freely.

One of the Syrians being released is Abu Wa’el Dhiab, who had waged a legal battle against the administration over his force feedings at the prison.

Cori Crider, a Director at human right group Reprieve and a lawyer for Dhiab, said: “We are grateful to the government of Uruguay—and President Mujica in particular—for this historic stand.”

“Very few people can truly comprehend what the cleared men in Guantanamo suffer every day, but I believe Mr. Mujica is one of them. Like President Mujica, Mr Dhiab spent over a dozen years as a political prisoner. Mr. Dhiab was never charged, never tried. President Mujica spent two years at the bottom of a well,” she said, referring to Mujica’s time imprisoned. “For most of the past two years, Mr. Dhiab has had a team of U.S. soldiers truss him up like an animal, haul him to a restraint chair, and force-feed him through a tube in his nose. The President’s compassion has ended that torture.”

Human Rights Watch welcomed the move as well, and urged other nations to follow Uruguay’s example.

“The transfer of six detainees to Uruguay is an important step toward ending the longstanding injustice of holding people indefinitely without charge at Guantanamo,” Laura Pitter, senior national security counsel at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement. “Responsibility for illegal detention at Guantanamo lies with the U.S., but other countries can help end this abuse by following Uruguay’s example and accepting detainees,” she said.

The Center for constitutional Rights adds that “by offering homes to men who have long been known to pose no threat, the international community can play a crucial role in closing this dark chapter in American history.”

One hundred thirty-six men are still being held at the offshore prison.

Clifford Sloan, the State Department’s special envoy on Guantanamo, called the transfer “a major milestone in our efforts to close the facility.”

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