

Obama Must Close Guantánamo and End Illegal Drone Strikes

By [Reprise](#)

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President Obama's [State of the Union address](#) last night obscured the fact that he has both the power to close Guantánamo Bay and a duty to do so as soon as possible, legal charity Reprise has said. The charity added that a recent ramping-up of US drone strikes undermined his words on setting "prudent limits" for their use.

Five years and one week on from his 2009 promise to close Guantánamo, the President used his annual address to blame the delay on Congressional blockage. In fact, the recent [National Defense Authorization Act](#) (NDAA) removed significant obstacles to transferring cleared detainees out of the prison, including a requirement that countries in which detainees can be resettled obtain special certification.

155 men remain in Guantánamo, 77 of whom have been cleared for release. According to information provided by the men to their lawyers at Reprise, 16 are being force-fed up to twice a day. More are thought to be on hunger strike.

[Katie Taylor](#), an investigator on Reprise's Guantánamo team said:

"The President's call for Guantánamo to be closed within the year is of course welcome. But the reality is that he already has the powers to release cleared detainees, such as Shaker Aamer - a UK resident whose return has been called for by Britain's Prime Minister.

"President Obama has found it convenient to blame Congress for his inaction, but this excuse will no longer wash. He needs to take immediate steps to ensure the release of cleared detainees - who make up more than half the population at the prison - and bring the US' detention regime under the rule of law."

Responding to the President's claim to have imposed "prudent" limits on the use of drones, Taylor cited a recent ramping-up of drones strikes in Yemen, including a [recent strike](#) (PDF) on a wedding party that killed 12 civilians and injured 14.

"The fact that innocent people attending a wedding can be targeted and killed shows that whatever limits President Obama has placed on the drone programme are absolutely inadequate."

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