

President elect Obama: Close Down Guantanamo!

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If Barack Obama is the humanitarian he appears to be, one of his first acts as president surely will be to shut down Guantanamo Bay prison and release its long-suffering inmates—nearly all of whom have spent years there without being charged with a crime.

President Bush's idea of "compassionate conservatism" has been to punish human beings presumed to be innocent in solitary cells in which no self-respecting zookeeper would cage baboons. Since President Bush ordered military commission trials in November, 2001, only two dozen of the hundreds of detainees at Guantanamo have even been charged and only three have been convicted.

According to a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW), a non-governmental advocacy organization located in New York, more than two-thirds of the 270 detainees at Guantanamo Bay are being housed in inhumane conditions that are "reportedly having a damaging effect on their mental health."

This phrase is generous understatement. The manner in which Gitmo prisoners are confined in a tiny cubicle with no sunlight, fresh air, books, family visits or contacts, and denied the company of other prisoners, reflects psychological sadism refined to its nth degree. Only vicious degenerates could contrive to inflict this living hell on other human beings.

"Guantanamo detainees who have not even been charged with a crime are being warehoused in conditions that are in many ways harsher than those reserved for the most dangerous, convicted criminals in the United States," said Jennifer Daskal, senior counterterrorism counsel at HRW.

"Security measures don't justify locking people in windowless cells...for months and years on end, with almost no opportunity for human interaction, physical exercise or mental stimulation," she said.

Unless you happened to see the Guantanamo cell replica Amnesty International put on tour in major cities, you cannot imagine the horror these prisoners are enduring. Let's just say a Gitmo cell resembles a small bathroom with sink, toilet, and tiny sliver of a window a few inches wide that cannot truly be called a window. There's room enough to stand, take two or three steps, and that's it.

According to HRW, "These detainees have extremely limited contact with other human beings, spend 22 hours a day alone in small cells with little or no natural light or fresh air, are not provided any educational opportunities, and are given little more than a single book and the Koran to occupy their time."

“Even their two hours of ‘recreation’ time — which is sometimes provided in the middle of the night—generally takes place in single-cell cages so that detainees cannot physically interact with one another,” the HRW report says.

HRW’s 54-page report, “Locked Up Alone: Detention Conditions and Mental Health at Guantanamo,” describes the impact on two detainees — Mohammed Jawad and Mohammad El Gharani — who were teenagers when taken into custody. Jawad has attempted suicide at least once and El Gharani at least seven times.

HRW says several prisoners reportedly are “suffering depression and anxiety disorder, and some reported having visions and hearing voices.” Requests by attorneys for outside psychiatric evaluations and improvements in conditions “have generally gone unanswered,” the human rights agency says.

Last March, the Pentagon said it would allow detainees to make phone calls home but so far only 40 have been allowed to do so.

Similarly, prison officials told HRW they planned to increase recreation time, allow prisoners to interact, and start language classes but “No schedule for these improvements,” HRW said, “has yet been announced.”

HRW called on the government to allow videoconferencing with family members and to provide detainees with educational opportunities “and materials to promote mental engagement and reduce depression,” such as additional books and writing and drawing materials.

The Bush regime’s practice of imprisoning suspects without charges, as it has done with hundreds of prisoners at Gitmo and tens of thousands of prisoners in Iraq, strongly suggests the Pentagon has no real case against them, and that the “War on Terror” is largely fraudulent, just as Bush’s attack on Iraq was based on lies.

If there is any justice in the world, the Pentagon officials that designed Guantanamo will be prosecuted and imprisoned themselves for this crime. Once he takes office, President Obama cannot move fast enough to rectify this national disgrace. #

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