



Guantanamo Bay 10 years on



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GROUP CAMPAIGN UPDATE

GUANTANAMO BAY

11 January 2012 marks ten years since the first detainees were transferred to the US detention facility in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

According to the US authorities, 779 detainees have been held in Guantánamo, the vast majority without charge or criminal trial.

Despite President Obama's January 2009 order to close the detention facility at Guantánamo within one year, the prison remains open with 171 men still being held there. Both the President and the Congress have embraced indefinite detention for 48 of the remaining detainees still held in Guantanamo.

The US administration has furthermore continued to pursue trials by military commission in proceedings which do not meet international fair trial standards. To date, only one Guantánamo detainee has been transferred to the US mainland for trial in a civilian court. The use of military tribunals to try people who are not members of a state's armed forces is incompatible with international human rights standards.

The United States government must end the practice of indefinite detention and unblock the domestic political impasse now preventing resolution of the Guantánamo detentions and start addressing the detentions as a human rights issue. All Guantánamo detainees should either be charged and prosecuted in fair trials in ordinary courts or released.

SHAKER AAMER – LAST UK RESIDENT IN GUANTANAMO

One of the detainees still held in Guantanamo is former UK resident Shaker Aamer. Shaker was one of the first detainees transferred to Guantanamo and has on the 14 of February 2012 spent 10 years in the detention facility without a charge or trial.

Originally from Saudi Arabia, he is married to a British citizen and has four British children who live in London. He had permission to live indefinitely in the UK when he was originally detailed in Afghanistan by Afghan forces in autumn of 2001 (among other places, he was held at the notorious US military prison at Bagram). He was later transferred to US custody in Afghanistan and in February 2002 sent to Guantánamo Bay where he still remains today, despite the repeated request from the UK government that he should be returned to the UK.

Shaker has alleged abuse and torture in US custody, according to his lawyers. He has protested against conditions at the Guantánamo detention facility, including participating in hunger strikes which has led to him spending much of his time in Guantanamo in solitary confinement. Recent reports about Shaker's health are that he is in a very frail mental and physical state.

Shaker Aamer's father-in-law Saeed Siddique, speaking on behalf of the family, recently explained to Amnesty International the impact his ten years at Guantánamo has had on them:

"It is a great injustice for the family", he said. "The family has been torn apart for ten years. Shaker is a person who is alive and has been detained without being charged for ten years. What kind of justice is this?"

Shaker is one of thousands of people the US government is currently holding without charge in violation of international law. More than 100 people are held without charge at Guantánamo, while over 2,000 people are held without charge at US facilities in Bagram, Afghanistan.

GROUP CAMPAIGN UPDATE

TAKE ACTION FOR SHAKER AAMER !

Former UK resident Shaker Aamer has been held at Guantanamo Bay without charge or trial for 10 years. The UK government has repeatedly called for him to be returned to his wife and four children who are waiting for him in London.

Under International law, holding someone indefinitely is a violation of human rights. The US government is obliged to either bring criminal charges against Shaker Aamer and give him a fair trial or release him. Urge the US government to resolve Shaker Aamer's case

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

SEND A LETTER

We would like you to Write a letter to Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and urge the US government to resolve Shaker Aamer's case.

PLEASE WRITE TO SECRETARY OF STATE HILARY CLINTON

TEMPLATE LETTER

Former UK resident Shaker Aamer has been held without charge or trial at Guantanamo Bay since February 2002. This year marks the tenth anniversary of both his detention and the opening of Guantanamo Bay detention centre.

I am writing to urge you to either charge and fairly try Shaker Aamer in a US federal court, or release him to the UK, where the government has repeatedly called for him to be returned his wife and four children in London.

The UK government has been seeking to secure Shaker's release since 2007, and in 2011 Foreign Secretary William Hague continued to press for Shaker's return. US citizens have also sent thousands of letters and e-mails to the President and Department of Defense, calling for Shaker's release.

Indefinite detention is a human rights violation and must end. All Guantanamo detainees must either be charged and tried in courts that meet international standards for fairness, such as a US federal court, or be released to countries where their human rights will be respected.

Sincerely,

SEND YOUR LETTER TO:

US Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington DC, 20520
USA

Salutation: Dear Secretary of State,

PLEASE ALSO SEND A LETTER TO THE US AMBASSADOR TO UK:

24 Grosvenor Square
London W1A 1AE

Salutation: Dear Ambassador Susman

GROUP CAMPAIGN UPDATE

TAKE ACTION- WORK WITH YOUR LOCAL MEDIA

During January and especially the time leading up to the 10 year anniversary on January 11 we would like you to raise awareness of the fact that Guantanamo Bay still exists, still violates Human Rights and to raise awareness of Shaker Aamer's case by working with your local media to get this message out to people in your area.

ACTIONS FOR WORKING WITH YOUR LOCAL MEDIA

There are three possible actions you can take

1. Write a letter to the Editor of your local newspaper (template letter on page 4)
2. Write an opinion Article in your local newspaper (template article on page 5)
3. Offer a radio interview to your local radio (advice on page 6)

Pick one of the actions that you would like to do or If possible, do all three - ie send the letter to one newspaper and the comment article to a different one (or offer them both to the same newspaper, as long as you explain that you are offering both to them), and approach a radio station as well.

Wherever possible, please personalise the materials, adding in a brief mention of your own / Local Groups campaigning including any notable local activity. If you suspect other activists in your area are likely to be approaching the same outlets, please liaise with them first.

FOR FURTHER ADVICE on how to work with your local media please contact Neil Durkin in the Amnesty UK Press Office at neil.durkin@amnesty.org.uk or 0207 033 1547.

WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU

PLEASE FEED BACK about your group's activities and possible local media coverage around the time of the 10 year anniversary of Guantanamo at activism@amnesty.org.uk

Best of luck with your action!

GROUP CAMPAIGN UPDATE

1. WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF YOUR LOCAL PAPER

TEMPLATE LETTER

Guantánamo letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

This month [11 January] it will be a staggering ten years since the first orange boiler-suited detainees were taken to Guantánamo Bay.

This extraordinary response to the horrors of the 9/11 attacks has developed into a whole decade of human rights abuse.

The story has now slipped out of the headlines, but 171 men are still held at Guantánamo. Of these, 167 have had no trial at all and the other four have been put through unfair “military commissions”. One of those still languishing without a trial is the former UK resident Shaker Aamer, a 43-year-old father-of-four whose family live in south London.

Shaker’s case has been raised with the US authorities by the UK government - both William Hague and Nick Clegg have asked for him to be released. To mark the ten-year “anniversary” of Guantánamo, Amnesty is stepping up its campaign for Shaker Aamer to be promptly released and returned to his family in Britain (please support that at www.amnesty.org.uk/shaker).

The 11 September 2001 attacks in the USA were absolutely horrific, but for the past ten years we have seen a catalogue of human rights abuses in response - renditions, secret detentions, torture, and of course Guantánamo Bay.

It is time for this travesty of justice to end.

Yours sincerely,

[name]

Amnesty group [if applicable]

GROUP CAMPAIGN UPDATE

2. WRITE AN OPINION ARTICLE IN YOUR LOCAL PAPER

TEMPLATE ARTICLE

Guantánamo: a ten-year travesty of justice

This month it's a staggering ten years since the first orange boiler-suited detainees were taken, blindfolded and manacled, to Guantánamo Bay on 11 January 2002.

At this time the world was still in shock at what had happened four months earlier on 11 September 2001. The attacks on the USA had been a dreadful crime against humanity, killing nearly 3,000 people of some 90 nationalities and numerous religions.

Yet, dismayingly, the United States chose to respond not with a concerted, lawful attempt to bring the perpetrators to justice. Instead it declared a "war on terror", ushering in a dark decade of CIA "renditions", secret detentions, the use of waterboarding and other torture techniques, and of course the incarceration without charge or trial of hundreds of men at its naval base in Cuba.

Guantánamo has now slipped out of the headlines. Some people might even assume that it is now closed (as President Obama promised it would be within a year of taking office in January 2009). In fact, 171 men are still held at the camp. Of these, 167 have had no trial whatsoever, while the remaining four have been put through an unfair "military commission".

One of those still held without a trial is the former UK resident Shaker Aamer, a 43-year-old father-of-four whose family live in south London. Mr Aamer, who has been held at Guantánamo since February 2002, is originally from Saudi Arabia but is married to a British citizen and has four British children. He had permission to live in the UK when he was detained in Afghanistan by Afghan forces in the autumn of 2001 (among other places, he was held at the notorious US military prison at Bagram); he was subsequently transferred to US custody in Afghanistan and later taken to Guantánamo.

Shaker Aamer's father-in-law Saeed Siddique, speaking on behalf of the family, recently explained to Amnesty International the impact his ten years at Guantánamo has had on them: "It is a great injustice for the family", he said. "The family has been torn apart for ten years. Shaker is a person who is alive and has been detained without being charged for ten years. What kind of justice is this?"

Indeed, what kind of justice is Guantánamo Bay for anyone? The rhetoric from the administration of George W Bush in the early years was that the camp was being used to hold only "the worst of the worst", dangerous "terrorists" who had been "captured on the battlefield". In fact, detainees have been taken into custody (usually without any due process) in at least ten countries, including Indonesia, Thailand, Azerbaijan, Zambia and Kenya. They have often been held in total secrecy before being taken to Guantánamo, including in "black site" prisons run by the CIA in places like Lithuania. At least 12 of those held at Guantánamo were under 18 years old when they were first taken into custody. One detainee, Omar Kadr, a Canadian national, was just 15 when he was detained by US forces in 2002; he is still at Guantánamo, having now spent more than a third of his life behind its razor wire and all without a fair trial.

As early as 2003 the distinguished UK judge Lord Steyn denounced Guantánamo as a "black hole" and a "monstrous failure of justice". All these years later the situation is, if anything, even worse. It took six-and-a-half years before the US Supreme Court even acknowledged that the Guantánamo detainees had a right to challenge the lawfulness of their detention in a US federal court. Now, despite (belated) US court rulings against the US government over Guantánamo, the White House is saying that it intends to hold 48 of the detainees indefinitely. No trial. Not now, not ever.

Amnesty is pressing the US authorities to charge or release the Guantánamo detainees, which is surely the least it should do after this enormous amount of time has elapsed. This whole sorry episode has been a stain on the reputation of US justice, while also providing a dangerous example to repressive regimes around the world, showing how a powerful nation can perpetrate wholesale human rights abuses in the name of "fighting terrorism".

At Amnesty we've always said that where the authorities suspect a person of terrorism then that person should be charged, given a fair hearing and if found guilty, properly imprisoned. Instead Guantánamo has been an utter travesty of justice. With ten shameful years on the clock, it's time for the USA to end this now.

GROUP CAMPAIGN UPDATE

3. OFFER AN INTERVIEW WITH LOCAL RADIO

The ten-year point of detentions at Guantánamo Bay is a notable event and you may be able to interest your local radio station - BBC, commercial or community station - in interviewing you on the topic.

If you feel confident about doing this, please consider making an approach to your local radio station (ideally a week or so in advance) offering yourself as a guest on the topic. If you or other Amnesty activists in your area have been involved in campaigning on Guantánamo in recent years, you should certainly mention this when you make your offer to the radio station.

You will most likely get a non-committal answer initially. Please do chase back a day or so later to see if they have yet decided (the chase-back call or email often leads to an interview). They may ask you to email something through - so please be ready to do this if requested.

Obviously you will need to be available to be interviewed on 11 January, most likely on the telephone from home in the morning, though possibly in the local radio station studio itself.

Remember, you do NOT need to be an expert on every aspect of Guantánamo - just somebody who is familiar with what Amnesty is saying and has a good basic overview of the issue and the key facts (see some useful key facts and figures in the Guantanamo Facts & Figures in email attachment).

Here are some tips on the basics of doing good broadcast interviews below.

Basics

- Outline your case, and what you are calling for
- Remember to say the name of your organisation
- Take your time (don't speak too quickly)
- Make your most important points at the beginning
- Use plain language and don't be too detailed

Preparation

Find out:

- how long the interview will be;
- will it be live or pre-recorded, over the phone, in a radio or TV studio or elsewhere;
- the rough line of questioning, or the first question.

Spend 15-20 minutes before the interview going over your notes. Think about likely questions - and the answers. Rehearse the main points out loud. If possible get someone to fire a few questions at you.

Memorise key messages

Have one or two key messages or 'talking points' in front of you. Use stories or case studies to illustrate points - it 'humanises' the issues or campaign - and a clear slogan or shocking statistic to emphasise your point.

Don't assume knowledge

Find out what kind of audience the show attracts - and tailor what you say accordingly. Speak clearly, avoid jargon and state the obvious. It's easy to lose listeners if your discussion becomes too complex too quickly.

Think of the interview like a conversation with a family or friend unfamiliar with the issues. This can also help with nerves, rather than imagining an audience of thousands!

Soundbites, repetition

'Education, education, education!' We hear politicians do it all the time. Use repetition to emphasise a point if possible.

Good presentation

Be friendly, alert and enthusiastic. Experts have found that content makes up 7% of the total impact of broadcast interviews, while presentation counts for 93%. On radio it's all about your voice. On TV it's also about eye contact and body language.

Difficult questions

Avoid defensive answers and always tell the truth. If you don't know the answer, just say so. Don't make comments 'off the record'.

GROUP CAMPAIGN UPDATE

RECENT AMNESTY REPORTS ON SECURITY WITH HUMAN RIGHTS

Europe: Open Secret: Mounting evidence of Europe's complicity in rendition and secret detention

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR01/023/2010/en>

Egypt: Time for justice: Egypt's corrosive system of detention

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE12/029/2011/en>

Saudi Arabia: Repression in the name of security

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/016/2011/en>

Unlock the truth in Lithuania: Investigate secret prisons now

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR53/002/2011/en>

FURTHER INFORMATION:

For all the latest campaign information visit our website www.amnesty.org.uk/terror

ANY QUESTIONS?

Contact the activism team on 0207 033 1675 or email activism@amnesty.org.uk