

WITNESS AGAINST TORTURE

Press Advisory: For Immediate Release

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GUANTÁNAMO DETAINEES TO GET THEIR DAY IN COURT

Witness Against Torture Activists to “Represent” Detainees in Trial, May 27

WASHINGTON, DC - Detainees at the U.S. Military Prison in Guantánamo will finally get their day in court on May 27 - Superior Court, in Washington DC.

That is when 35 Americans from cities and towns across the country will go on trial for a protest at the U.S. Supreme Court on January 11, 2008. They face charges of either “unlawful free speech” or “causing a harangue” or both. Each count carries a maximum penalty of 60 days in jail, as well as fines and court fees.

In a new twist on traditional protest, the 35 activists will enter their names as those of actual Guantánamo inmates. On January 11th, they were arrested without their own identification and were taken into custody under the name of a Guantánamo prisoner. This act symbolically grants the Guantánamo prisoners their day in court-- which the Pentagon has denied them for years.

Father Bill Pickard, a Catholic priest from Scranton, PA, is one of the defendants. But he will be tried “as” Faruq Ali Ahmed, a Guantánamo detainee. “I went to the Supreme Court to make a simple plea that the inhumane treatment and actual torture of inmates at Guantánamo Bay stop,” says Fr. Pickard. “I went to bring the name and the humanity of Faruq Ali Ahmed – who claims he traveled to Afghanistan in 2001 simply to teach the Koran to children and that he has no affiliation with the Taliban or Al Qaeda – before the law. He cannot do it himself, so I am called by my faith, my respect for the rule of law and my conscience to do it for him.” Among the defendants is a hog farmer from Grinnell, Iowa, a social worker from Saratoga Springs, New York, and a legal secretary from Baltimore.

Representing themselves, the defendants plan on justifying their acts as upholding U.S. law and international human rights and will call witnesses to document the abuses at Guantánamo.

Witness Against Torture will hold two events related to the trial on May 27:

At 7:45 am, dressed in orange jumpsuits and black hoods, those facing trial will carry their Guantánamo inmates' names from the U.S. Supreme Court (Maryland Avenue and First Street) to the D.C. Superior Court (Carl Moultrie Court House, 500 Indiana, Ave NW), where their cases will be heard.

At 8:30 am, Witness Against Torture will hold a press conference outside the Superior Court. Defendants and witnesses will address the media. They will also hold a ceremony of justice, expressing their demand that the rights and humanity of the detainees be respected by placing placards bearing the detainees' names alongside copies of the U.S. Constitution, the Geneva Convention, and the sacred texts of various religious traditions.

The trial will begin at 9:30 am. Press is invited to attend all the proceedings.

The January 11 protest was organized by Witness Against Torture (www.witnesstorture.org), which was formed in 2005 when 25 Americans walked from Cuba to the U.S. detention facility at Guantánamo.

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