

Transcript of Statement from Mohammed Sulaymon Barre

Mohammed Sulaymon Barre was released from Guantanamo on December 20, 2009, and returned to his family in Somaliland. Mr. Barre had fled Somalia during the civil war in the early 1990s. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees granted Mr. Barre refugee status in Pakistan where he lived and worked freely for many years prior to his detention. In November 2001, soon after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistani authorities came to Mr. Barre's house in the middle of the night and arrested him. He is believed to have been sold to the United States for bounty at a time when the United States was offering sizable sums for the handover of purported enemies. Once in the custody of U.S. forces, Mr. Barre was sent to the U.S. military base at Bagram, where U.S. guards abused him and coercively interrogated him before transferring him to Guantánamo. He was never charged with any crime.

“I say to the torturers of Guantanamo, their leaders, and the politicians and people of power who back them in Washington: is it not time that you should awaken from your slumber? Is it not time that you should realize what you are doing and acknowledge the mistakes you have made? Time has passed, and time passes quickly. Hurry up and close this prison that has become a blot of shame upon all of America. Do it fast. Do it quickly.

“Closing this place should not mean just the transfer of these men to other prisons. That would only make things worse. Closing it should mean the release of these men and transferring them to where they can be safe.

“And that is not enough. There should be an appropriate and reasonable apology.

“To those who say that they fear that those men, when released, would join enemy groups and therefore we should keep them in prison indefinitely, I say: don't you know that keeping these detainees in prison is the very thing that feeds the animus against the United States? I say to those who believe in these notions: the thing you fear is the very thing you cause by your wrongful actions. This is what constitutes the real threat to the national security of the United States, not the closing of the prison and the release of detainees.

“Peace be upon you.” -Mohammed Sulaymon

Helen Schietinger, Reflection on the Guantanamo Prisoner Procession

Once again we processed in single file, hooded in orange jump suits, our footsteps guided by Carmen Trotta's orders: “Detainees, follow me. Detainees, stop. Detainees, turn right.” Carmen was playing the role of the soldier.

Inside the stuffy hood, my glasses fogged up. I kept my eyes on the person in front of me and tried to maintain the pace without stumbling -- light-headed on this, the first day of the fast. When would we get there? Block after block we walked -- slowly, deliberately, our handlers leap-frogging the procession to stand at curbs and warn us where we might stumble.

Today I could feel the presence of an amazing number of press people all around us. All along our route, photographers crouched to capture the solemn image of the human chain we have become. Newscasters posed beside our line, talking into the camera as we walked by, creating sound-bites for the evening news. Today the media attention never stopped.

When we arrived at the National Press Club and again stood in a line, cameras continued to snap photos of our hoods, our shapes, our collective statement. I hope they throw the images up on TV and computer screens and pique the conscience of the world.

Frida Berrigan, Statement at Public Briefing, National Press Club

Organizer with Witness Against Torture

Witness Against Torture is a grassroots movement that began with the question: “how do we resist the cruelty our country perpetrates in the name of opposing terror.” In 2005, the answer led 25 of us to go to Cuba and walk to the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo with the intention of visiting the men detained there. Since then, we have organized demonstrations, vigils, rallies and direct action aimed at drawing attention to policies of torture, abuse and inhumanity and reminding the American people of the political and human costs of these policies.

And as such, Guantanamo—and all it represents—is not only the concern of the men detained, their families and their lawyers. It is something that should concern us all. And I am here to say that it does. There are conscientious people all over this country and throughout the world -- students, mothers and fathers, activists, regular people-- who are organizing to close Guantanamo, to make sure that the U.S. does not open new regimes of detention without charge or trial, to push the U.S. to charge or release the men held at Guantanamo and to ensure that those who have tortured are held accountable.

A year ago today, January 11 2009, we gathered in DC to mark what we hoped would be the last anniversary of Guantanamo's existence. We fasted until the inauguration of Barack Obama on January 20th. We shared the relief and satisfaction felt by many when-- on his second day in office—President Obama signed the Executive Order and pledged to close Guantanamo within the year.

The hope that animated our coming together last year has now been replaced with anger and indignation. The promise of Guantanamo's closure, is mocked by the fact that—for the men at Guantanamo-- the only significant change they see is that the Presidential portrait hanging on the prison wall in Cuba, is of Barack Obama, not George W. Bush.

Today, in a moment marked by deeply manipulated and nearly hysterical fear and punctuated by some of the most hateful, retrograde rhetoric we've heard in nearly a decade, Witness Against Torture is launching another fast: a twelve-day fast and daily vigil through the streets and corridors of power of Washington. More than 50 of us are together in DC through this time and we are joined by over 100 more who are fasting and witnessing in their own communities.

For us, this fast is

- An act of moral witness — against the crimes of torture, indefinite detention, rendition, and the denial of legal and human rights
- A political demand — that Guantanamo close, tortured be definitively banned, and that all U.S. detainees receive true justice and equality before the law
- An act of solidarity — with the suffering of the men, boys, and women held in Guantanamo, Bagram or other U.S. detention facilities around the world
- An act of atonement — for our nations' violation of domestic and international law, human rights, and its own principle
- An expression of hope — that President Barack Obama finally honor his pledge to close Guantanamo, not by exporting it to Illinois or hiding it away in Afghanistan, but by really closing it and ending the injustice it represents
- An act of renewal — that calls America back to its senses and to its core values; that seeks to make those values stronger, inviolable; and which helps to reconnect America to the peoples of the world.

Speaking personally, I am not excited about fasting. I like food, a lot. But, President Obama's promises of change have atrophied into empty rhetoric. And, now, I watch in horror as my country rises up in fear and vengeance once again; as the debased torture policies of the Bush administration are defended and described once more as necessary.

Mahatma Gandhi said: "under certain circumstances, fasting is the one weapon God has given us for use in times of utter helplessness."

Binyam Mohamed participated in the hunger strikes at Guantanamo, and his reason was simple: "we ask only for justice: treat us as promised under the rules of the Geneva Conventions for civilians prisoners while we are held and either treat us fairly for valid criminal charges or set us free."

And so, I fight against the feelings of "utter helplessness" with Gandhi's peaceful weapon, with Binyam's peaceful weapon-- by fasting. This act is my small attempt—as part of Witness Against Torture and in concert with all those working for justice-- to answer the ultimate question Guantanamo poses: how do we conquer fear and remain human?

Thank you.

Former Detainees Boumediene and Deghayes Address President Obama on Guantánamo Anniversary

Human Rights Attorneys and Activists Hold Rally, March and Briefing to Demand Closure of Base and Oppose Preventive Detention in U.S.

Contact: press@ccrjustice.org

January 11, 2010, Washington, D.C. – To mark the beginning of the ninth year of detention without charge or trial at Guantánamo today, activists and lawyers of detained men held a rally, a march, and a public briefing to outline current issues related to President Obama’s Guantanamo, demand that the president make good on his pledge to close the prison, and declare their opposition to any plan for holding prisoners without charge or trial in the U.S. Formerly detained men and detainee families addressed President Obama via a combination of video, audio, and written letters.

Lakhdar Boumediene called in to the briefing at the National Press Club from his home in France, and **Omar Deghayes** joined the briefing from his home in the United Kingdom. Mr. Boumediene was the lead plaintiff in the landmark Supreme Court case of 2008, *Boumediene v. Bush*, in which the Court affirmed that Guantánamo detainees have the right to file writs of habeas corpus in U.S. federal courts. He was released on May 15, 2009. As a child, Omar Deghayes settled with his family in the U.K. as a refugee from Lybia. Picked up in Pakistan and sent to Bagram and Guantánamo, he was blinded in one eye at the base in 2004. Mr. Deghayes was released from Guantanamo to the U.K. on December 19, 2007.

The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) briefing also featured a recorded [statement](#) from **Mohammed Sulaymon Barre** from his home in Somaliland and other detainee voices addressing the president. Said Mr. Barre, who was released on December 20, 2009, “Hurry up and close this prison that has become a blot of shame upon all of America. Do it fast. Do it quickly.”

Detainee lawyers and human rights activists spoke on “Obama’s Guantánamo,” addressing issues including the continued and worsening lack of transparency, resettlement for men who cannot return to their home countries, the threat of indefinite detention schemes in the U.S., the halt of transfers to Yemen and related responses to the recent terrorism attempt, and more.

Vincent Warren, CCR Executive Director, **Pardiss Kebriyaii**, CCR attorney for detainees, **Frida Berrigan** of Witness Against Torture, and **Stacy Sullivan**, Counterterrorism Advisor at Human Rights Watch spoke about the current situation and the challenges and dangers ahead.

Said CCR Executive Director Vincent Warren, “This is Obama’s Guantánamo now. He has failed in his pledge to close the island prison from a lack of leadership, bowing to the pressures of partisan grandstanding, and vigorous attempts to keep all cases out of the courts. The transparency we were promised has been discarded. This is an anniversary that should not have come.”

“The Obama administration should commemorate Guantanamo’s eighth anniversary by renewing its pledge to close the detention center swiftly and responsibly,” said Stacy Sullivan, counterterrorism advisor at Human Rights Watch. “Thus far, the Obama administration has been very careful about not sending detainees back to countries where they are likely to face torture, abuse, or further indefinite detention without charge. That said, we are very concerned that several detainees may be facing involuntary repatriation to countries such as Algeria and Tajikistan. We urge the administration not to follow through with these plans.”

Said Frida Berrigan, a Brooklyn, NY, organizer with Witness Against Torture, "I do not relish the idea of fasting. But President Obama's promises of change have atrophied into empty rhetoric. And, now I watch in horror as my country rises up in fear and vengeance once again. I watch in horror as the debased torture policies of the Bush administration are defended, described once more as necessary. Our Fast and Vigil for Justice is a small attempt to answer the ultimate question Guantanamo poses: how do we conquer fear and remain human?"

Earlier, members of Witness Against Torture (WAT) held a rally in front of the White House to protest the lack of progress toward justice for detainees since Obama took office and demanded true change from the administration. Speakers announced a 12-Day Fast for Justice in Washington D.C., ending on January 22 – the Obama administration's self-declared, and now-voided, deadline for closing Guantánamo.

Following the demonstration, activists staged a Guantánamo prisoner procession to the National Press Club where they joined the briefing.

To learn more and see a video of Mr. Barre's statement and other resources, visit <http://ccrjustice.org/obamas-guantanamo>.

CCR has led the legal battle over Guantanamo for the last eight years – sending the first ever habeas attorney to the base and sending the first attorney to meet with a former CIA “ghost detainee” there. CCR has been responsible for organizing and coordinating more than 500 pro bono lawyers across the country in order to represent the men at Guantanamo, ensuring that nearly all have had the option of legal representation. In addition, CCR has been working to resettle the approximately 50 men who remain at Guantánamo because they cannot return to their country of origin for fear of persecution and torture.

The Center for Constitutional Rights is dedicated to advancing and protecting the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Founded in 1966 by attorneys who represented civil rights movements in the South, CCR is a non-profit legal and educational organization committed to the creative use of law as a positive force for social change.