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## Guantanamo Bay military prison – A monument to suffering and injustice

By Dr. Dylan Murphy

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The eleventh anniversary of the opening of the Guantanamo Bay military prison has recently passed with barely a murmur from the mainstream media or western governments. There are 166 prisoners still held without charge or trial. 85 of these prisoners have been cleared for release by the Bush and Obama administrations yet they remain in prison with no end in sight to their incarceration.

Almerindo Ojeda from the UC Davis Centre for Human Rights and lead investigator for the Guantanamo Testimonials Project has been documenting evidence of the abuse of these prisoners. On RT's show Breaking The Set he recently commented, 'Nobody speaks for them, there has been a conspiracy from all branches of US government to keep them there and they just languish. These 85 are not terrorists'.

The remaining prisoners are divided into two groups. Half are scheduled for trial and the other half will never be released. Almerindo Ojeda has stated that the US military will not release these 40 prisoners as they are, "considered too dangerous to release and impossible to try. Now why are they impossible to try? It's because the evidence doesn't bear trial or because the evidence [against them] is torture".

Of the 166 prisoners still at Guantanamo military prison there are twelve people who have been locked up there since day one back in January 2002. One of these twelve is Shaker Aamer, who is a permanent British resident and is married to a British citizen, who has been cleared of any wrong doing by the US authorities but they won't allow him to return to his family in London.

For these twelve prisoners life is a daily nightmare as they wait endlessly in an American made purgatory languishing with no hope of release. Almerindo Ojeda has observed:

"For them Guantanamo is a daily reality of unfair procedures, of solitary confinement, of undue punishment and also of indefinite detention. People don't talk about that very much. Under normal circumstances you get a trial and a sentence that has a beginning and an end. Here you have neither".

According to US military authorities these prisoners are not lawful combatants and are not there as prisoners of war. Therefore they have no rights what so ever. This is clear evidence of how since 9/11 the American military and political establishment has thrown the Geneva Convention and other aspects of international law out of the window. For them the entire planet is a battlefield and their endless military campaigns respect no borders or rules of war/law.

It is all too easy for many people in the West to shrug their shoulders and say there is nothing we can do about this. Worse still is the attitude: what does it really matter what happens at places like Guantanamo. What has happened at Guantanamo Bay military prison are crimes against humanity which should never be forgotten. These crimes should be investigated and those responsible should be brought to justice and punished.

The evidence of criminality at Guantanamo Bay is overwhelming and should be enough for any court to convict those responsible. In 2003 the American Civil Liberties Union filed a freedom of information request with the US government for access to documents relating to the military prison at Guantanamo Bay. This led to the eventual release of 100,000 documents detailing the abuse of people held in US military prisons. In January 2007 the FBI provided over 800 of these documents, 500 of which related to Guantanamo Bay. The UC Davis Centre for the Study of Human Rights in the Americas has launched the Guantanamo Testimonials Project. This has organized the released of redacted FBI documents into an online archive open to public study. These testimonies of FBI agents who visited Guantanamo Bay detail physical, medical, religious, verbal, psychological and sexual abuse of prisoners.

Many prisoners told FBI agents that torture was the primary method used to obtain information,

"When asked about [redacted] [he] advised that he only made that statement because he was being beaten".

Standard mistreatment of prisoners includes the use of isolation, physical and verbal abuse in an attempt to break prisoners who will then confess to anything their interrogators want to hear:

"After being interview by two females, he was taken to the "dark place". At the "dark place", a hood was placed over his head and he was yelled at and beaten. [redacted] stated that because of his treatment at the hands of his captors he provided the interrogators with whatever information that they wanted to hear".

Another prisoner told an FBI agent of a similar terrifying experience.

According to [redacted], an unknown number of guards entered his cell, unprovoked, and started spitting and cursing at him. The guards called him a "son of a bitch" a "bastard" then told him he was crazy. [redacted] rolled on to his stomach to protect himself.... a soldier named [redacted] jumped on his back and started beating him in the face. [redacted] then choked him until he passed out. ...[redacted] indicated that there was a female guard who was also beating him and grabbed his head and beat it into the cell floor. ... the camp warden visited him at the hospital and told the doctors to immediately return him to the camp".

Another common torture method was to use isolation, temperature and food/water deprivation to break a prisoner and to get them to talk:

On a couple of occasions, I entered interview rooms to find a detainee chained hand and foot in a fetal position to the floor, with no chair food or water. Most times they has urinated or defecated on themselves, and had been left there for 18, 24 hours or more. On one occasion, the air conditioning had been turned down so far and the temperature was so cold in the room that the bare footed detainee was shaking with cold. When I asked the MP's what was going on, I was told that the interrogators from the day before had ordered this treatment, and the detainee was not to be moved".

Other forms of abuse include prisoners being threatened with dogs, prisoners being told that their families had been arrested and would be moved to foreign countries for interrogation if they didn't talk, prisoners having their head and mouth covered in duct tape.

The abuse got so bad that many prisoners resorted to hunger strikes in protest:

The mental condition of the detainees is to the point where the detainees are all participating in a hunger strike. The detainees are upset with the way they are being treated by the guards. They are upset because they are being held as prisoners without being charged with a crime or being released".

Many prisoners have committed suicide due to the abuse and/or torture they suffered. The first three suicides at Guantanamo Bay military prison were found hanging with cloths in their mouths with their hands bound behind their backs. Almerindo Ojeda has made the

point how can you hang yourself with your hands bound behind you back? He has called for a full and impartial investigation into these deaths and of all those who have died under suspicious circumstances at Guantanamo. Not surprisingly, none of these suicides have been investigated as is required under article 121 of the Geneva convention.

President Obama is not only ignoring international law he is ignoring his own executive order that the Guantanamo military prison be closed down. Days after his re-election Obama closed down the government office given the job of working to close Guantanamo down.

The Obama administration seems determined to not only defy international law it is also waging a massive campaign of persecution against whistle-blowers who expose America's war crimes. John Kiriakou is a former CIA investigator who has exposed how torture was official US policy at Guantanamo and other military prisons. He has recently been sentenced to two years in prison for this. In a recent interview John Kiriakou noted how CIA torturers, politicians who conceived of torture as official military policy, lawyers who gave "crazed legal analysis" to sanction the torture and former agents who write books justifying torture are not facing arrest or any kind of legal sanction. He added, that he knows of one former CIA agent who destroyed evidence of torture and is presently engaged in a book tour, giving speeches around Washington DC saying how great torture is.

Calls for Guantanamo military prison to be closed down have come from all over the world. These include the European Parliament, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Bishop Desmond Tutu and many others. The Close Guantanamo campaign in America sent a message to President Obama shortly after his re-election:

"Before 9/11, indefinite detention used to be associated only with regimes that prided themselves on their disdain for the rule of law; dictatorships, in other words. Nearly eleven years after the prison at Guantanamo opened, two successive U.S. administrations -- that of George W. Bush, and, since 2009, that of Barack Obama -- have demonstrated that America is no better than these dictatorships.

Let this be the last year that Guantanamo remains open.