



CAGE PRISONERS

PRESS RELEASE: Tuesday 13th June 2006

Released Detainees Refute US Guantanamo Suicide Cover Up

London – Former Guantanamo detainees, including the 9 British nationals released from the camp, have poured scorn on allegations that the three deaths at Guantanamo were suicides and claim that they are almost certainly accidental killings caused by excessive force used by US guards there.

Moazzam Begg, in a statement on behalf of all the freed British detainees elucidates that the camp's regime is designed to dehumanise detainees and to make them bereft of hope and believe they have no rights – framing and encouraging suicide amongst them – and suggesting imaginative ways to do so.

Tarek Dergoul, who spent significant time with two of the deceased, provides the first in depth insight into their time in Guantanamo. He describes both Manei al-Otaibi and Yasser al-Zahrani as having indefatigable spirits, never once discussing or contemplating suicide, and being the foremost in their lack of cooperation with their captors and long term committed hunger strikers; leading them to be punished by frequent reprisals and beatings by guards. That it was camp policy to systematically beat incoherent prisoners, Tarek says, makes it hardly surprisingly that such vicious attacks could result in death.

He further elaborates that in Camp One, where he was also held – it would have been physically impossible for them to have committed suicide successfully.

Abdullah Alnoami a former detainee from Bahrain substantiates this accusation, exposing the true nature what was previously believed to be the most off-quoted suicide attempt at the base, of a Saudi detainee in December 2002. Following an ERF attack, Mishal Al Harbi was left in a coma and permanently paralysed and restricted to a wheelchair for life.

Dr. Adnan Siddiqui of Cageprisoners said *"It is clear that the US administrations claim that these deaths were suicide does not stand up close scrutiny and we call on the US administration to allow a full and independent inquiry to debunk the cover up and lies that these deaths were suicide and not murder."*

Cage Prisoners is a human rights organisation that exists solely to raise awareness of the plight of the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and other detainees held as part of the War on Terror. We aim to give a voice to the voiceless.

Contact: Asim Qureshi:
Email: asim.q@cageprisoners.com
Number: 0044 (0) 7973264197

www.cageprisoners.com

In the Name of Allah Most Compassionate Most Merciful

Statement on the Deaths in Guantánamo Bay

It is with great sorrow and anger that we have received news of the deaths of three Muslim men detained for over four years in Guantánamo Bay. Our first words are condolences from the Qur'an, "Verily, we came from Allah and to Him we shall return", with which we reach out to the families of the deceased. Manei al-Otaibi, Yasser al-Zahrani (Saudi Arabia) and Ali Abdullah Ahmed Al Salami (Yemen) were victims of a system we all know painfully too well – a system that has led to their deaths.

Some of us know what it's like to see our own children for the very first time, after years spent in a cell the size of a small toilet; or to see our fathers, mothers and wives after being made to believe that we would never see them again. Sadly, that threat is now a reality for these three men and their families – at least in this life. Just like all of us, these men were sons, brothers, husbands and kin to people who waited in agony for years hoping for news of their loved ones. And this is how they receive it.

One of the tools used by US interrogators – a fact now accepted by several former US personnel who served in Guantánamo – was to remove all notions of hope. We were not only made to believe that we would never see our families again, but also, that we would remain in custody for decades, without charge or trial. Some of us were even threatened with execution. We were constantly told the US administration's policy toward detainees, which has not changed to date, was that we had "no rights". Toilet paper, soap, toothbrushes, bed sheets, reading and writing materials, 15 minutes of 'recreation' twice weekly in an area three times the size of our cells, showers and changes of clothing were all considered privileges which could be, and were, removed at the whims of guarding Military Police (MP) units.

In Guantánamo we witnessed numerous suicide attempts; we know that hundreds of prisoners were regularly on hunger strike in protest against arbitrary, long-term incarceration and ill treatment, because we were among them. We know that prisoners were force-fed and forcibly injected with unknown chemicals in order to keep them alive. We were told that the US really 'didn't give a damn' about the detainees, but they [detainees] had to remain alive to 'feel the punishment for their crimes' despite having no charges, no trials and no recourse to justice.

All of us had been physically and sexually degraded, beaten, forcibly stripped and shaved, and then abandoned for up to three years by our government. Some of us were placed in isolation cells for years – with no natural light. We all contemplated suicide at some point (some of us were even shown innovative methods of killing ourselves, as suggested by US military psychiatrists). As days turned into weeks, months and years – without a foreseeable end, thoughts of never wanting to wake up, after falling asleep, often came. As a result, severe depression was something none of us were immune from. But our will to survive prevailed. Our hope against hope was that we lived to tell our story to the world one day.

We only have the US military's word for it that the three men in fact did commit suicide, and it is difficult to imagine a scenario where US authorities would ever allow an independent and timely inquiry into the deaths, or even release the 'suicide notes' they claim were left. After all, US guards in other military detention facilities have been found responsible for killing detainees – almost four years after the fact.

The prisoners in Guantánamo knew Manei al-Otaibi as someone who recited the Qur'an and poetry with a beautiful voice. He was of high moral character and was loved and respected amongst the prisoners, as was Yasser. They both came from wealthy backgrounds and had everything to live for.

They were often involved in protests and hunger strikes, which meant that they were always given 'level four' statuses. That means the only items they would be allowed in the cell were a mat, and a blanket (only at night). They didn't have toilet paper, let alone bed sheets that could be easily constructed into a noose, or even a pen and paper with which to write a suicide note. After being on hunger strikes for months on end there is little doubt these men would also have been very

weak. To end the hunger strike Extreme Reaction Force (ERF) teams were usually sent in to forcibly enter the cell and remove prisoners to the hospital, where the medical staff would then force feed them. That means soldiers, in helmets and full body armour, carrying shields, would charge down the block and enter the cell. Just before entry, the prisoners would be doused with pepper spray in the face, causing them to cover their eyes and mouths, often before vomiting. The prisoners were often smashed down against the floor under the full crushing body weight of five US Military Policemen. Some of us had our heads hit against the ground or put in the toilet; fingers were poked in our ears and eyes; we would be put in headlocks, arm locks, jumped on and kned in the back whilst all the other detainees listened to the screams and shouts and fearfully awaited their own turn. Some of us were even rendered unconscious by this method. These actions were filmed by a 6th guard and watched by the guard commander. The same procedure would be repeated for each detainee who 'failed to comply'. It is not difficult to envisage unintended deaths ensuing from this process, since we feared for our own lives when it happened to us. It is harder to imagine three simultaneous suicides.

It has been reported that the three men died in Camp 1 (Delta). We know that the only isolation block in Camp 1 is 'India', where there are no places to attach or tie anything, since the cells are made of sheet steel welded together. In our experience, suicide attempts in this camp could only be, and were, made in the main cellblocks, where the cells were constructed of meshed steel, through which sheets could be threaded. Those of us who ever witnessed a prisoner attempting suicide always raised the alarm instantaneously by screaming and banging on our cells. The guards, who were always patrolling the blocks or were close by, would respond immediately to take down the prisoner. Many questions about the official story remain unanswered.

In our experience, the official US response from Guantánamo to the deaths is not surprising: they call it a 'Public Relations stunt' and a method of 'asymmetrical warfare'. We, who have suffered the misery and hopelessness of Guantánamo and understand what it is which can drive a perfectly rational man to take his own life, know otherwise. The Americans were always dreading the possibility of the death of a prisoner in Guantánamo *precisely* because of Public Relations and world opinion. In sharp contrast, the US administration has had no qualms about detainee deaths in places like the Bagram detention facility it operates in Afghanistan – where many detainees were initially held. The media has had very little access to Bagram, where, not surprisingly, world opinion remains muted. They have always known that the rest of the world – allies included – feels at best uncomfortable with Guantánamo, while the chorus of powerful voices unequivocally calling for the closure of the US base grows daily. The pathetic response offered by the US military commander at Guantánamo Bay is symptomatic of the paranoid and ludicrous nature that now shapes the disastrous 'war on terror'. The fact is that the US began losing its own asymmetrical PR war on the very day pictures of Camp X-Ray were circulated by the world's media. We hope that this episode produces the final nail in the coffin of Guantánamo Bay, that the detainees are safely returned to their families, and that this darkest of chapters in modern US history is finally closed.

Feroz Abbassi, Rhuhel Ahmed, Moazzam Begg, Richard Belmar, Tarek Dergoul, Jamal al-Harith, Asif Iqbal, Martin Mubanga and Shafiq Rasul.

**British citizens formerly held at Guantánamo Bay
13-06-06**

In the Name of Allah Most Compassionate Most Merciful

Tarek Dergoul: Another Guantanamo Whitewash

Suicide?

I knew them personally, so I can judge well their frame of mind. Their *iman* (belief in God) was very strong, there was high morale and it comes as a complete shock to my system when it is said to me that they could have committed suicide.

I was with them for a long period of time, and it never even came into our mind the thought of committing suicide. We were always far too busy constructing some form of hunger strike or non-cooperation strike, to even register the thought of suicide. It is quite simply ridiculous. When we were not in isolation for our continued protests we were in the regular blocks planning our next move.

We were always on level 4 which consisted of a mat and a blanket only. We did not have toilet paper; let alone a pen and paper to write a suicide note! As for the world's experience of the Bush administration, its lies and propaganda and my personal experiences at Guantanamo alongside these men, I am very dubious of the reasons given of the deaths of these men.

The very thought of three suicides in one go, so-called suicides in one go; it brings about suspicion that there was foul play definitely involved. This was the only way the Americans could cover up the reality, by claiming that it was suicide.

Consider again that these men, they have been on hunger strike for months and months on end and as a result they were extremely fragile and weak. When you then also think about the ERF, and being attacked by the ERF team which consists of five guards who are dressed in full riot gear with the plastic shields, pepper spray and dogs, then the rests the high risk of being hurt once the attack begins.

I, myself, was hurt by the ERF team and was knocked unconscious. They smash your head on the floor, they poke their fingers in your eyes, in your ears and then place you in a headlock, arm lock and your beard is shaved. So if they do all of this while you are on hunger strike, then that can result in disastrous consequences.

My analysis of the situation is that this time the ERF team went too far and they either died accidentally, or intentionally killed them, this is the only reasonable explanation.

Cover-Up

With regard to the possibility of this having taken place in isolation, then this action was done in Camp I, and in Camp I there is only one isolation block, that being *India*. This isolation block consists of 24 cells, and it is made up in such a way that it is impossible to hang anything, let alone even the wildest of thoughts that you could hang yourself. You could probably just about thread a piece of string through the mesh. So in terms of the isolation block in Camp I, it is impossible for them to have hung themselves there.

If you are talking about the regular blocks, I have actually witnessed people hanging myself. When you see a person hanging, then everyone begins to scream and shout and bang on the metal to call for assistance. Basically, the other inmates will always raise an alarm, the guards come rushing, they open the door and they let the guy down. Whoever it is, they will never be hanging for longer than 30 or 40 seconds. For the hanging to go unnoticed, then that is impossible, let alone to be possible for three of them.

These guys, they were not the kind of people to commit suicide. They came from wealthy backgrounds; one of them was due to be released. Yasser al-Zahrani, he was a person who had memorised the entire Qur'an. He had participated in all the hunger strikes and non-cooperation

strikes; he had so much determination, will-power and morale that it is ridiculous to think he could have taken his own life.

My Companions

I cannot actually remember the first time I met them, but we spent a lot of time with one another. The reason for this was that there were always a certain number of people who were on punishment due to the protests that were organised. As I mentioned before the non-cooperation strikes which would include not speaking in interrogation and also not standing for any immoral behaviour (such as being sexually harassed or watching the Qur'an being desecrated) would result in punishment.

We were always on the forefront of the protests, and the two Saudi guys, Yasser al-Zahrani and Manei al-Otaibi would be the first amongst all others to stand up for our rights and the rights of others.

Yasser al-Zahrani was a beautiful brother; he was 5'8"', had long hair (before it was shaved off), was softly spoken and had a very nice voice. He used to sing nasheeds for us (Islamic songs) and all the brothers loved him as he was always optimistic. He would sing morale boosting nasheeds for the other detainees nearby to him. He was very well known to everyone in the camp.

He ended up doing a lot of time in isolation simply due to the fact that he would never allow for an injustice to take place before him without being defiant for the sake of our rights. I am sure that as more time passes and more people are released and asked about this situation, the truth will avail, and the world will understand that he was a nice guy and that he could never have committed suicide.

As for Manei, he was also another beautiful brother. He had a slim build and was extremely funny. He used to recite poetry, in fact this was the thing he was best known for and he also used to sing nasheeds for us. He was beautifully funny guy, and he was always on the forefront of trying to get our rights.

I stayed beside Manei for three weeks inside the regular blocks, and that is when he told me about his wealthy family and his previous life and how he used to get up to no good as people do when they are young. It was also during those three weeks that he taught me tajweed (the science of reciting the Qur'an correctly). By the end of that time we had shared with one another our inner most thoughts.

I consider it an insult and I am sure that family find it equally offensive, to suggest that he would stoop to the level of taking his own life.

Demonisation

Thankfully, a lot of respectable people in the media have played certain comments down, especially in light of the whole world asking for Guantanamo Bay to be shut down. For them to come up with a statement suggesting that they were 'creative' or that this was a form of 'asymmetric warfare' is horrendous, it is not even logical. The guys were in cages, they were desperate, they had been tortured, he still had everything to live for, so why would he go and do such a thing?

Hunger strikes and non-cooperation strikes were the PR stunts (if that is how they want to refer to them) but to commit suicide - that is impossible. This Commander, I'm sure he doesn't live in Guantanamo. I would be surprised if he has spent even any significant time in the camps.

The whole thing is a cover up, they are lost for words and so they are saying it is a PR stunt.

Tarek Dergoul
13-06-06

This statement was written by Bahraini former detainee at Guantanamo Bay Abdulla Alnoaimi in response to the deaths of Mani Al Utaybi, Yasser Al Zahrani and Ali Abdullah Ahmed at the military prison on Saturday.

As of my old experience of Guantanamo Bay, I have some points of view on the death of the detainees.

ONE: Was it "suicide"?

In the end of December 2002 a big incident happened in the camp which the whole world did not know about. A former Saudi detainee was knocked unconscious and went into a coma of long months. The incident started at night when the MP's (military police) were very rude and aggressive, full of hate, they went to the detainees in block India (isolation block), they kept entering detainees' cells and hitting them and then going to the next and so on.

They entered the cells of sleeping people, some who were praying, and some very young guys, hitting them. The guards then turned off the light and kept going to cells to hit the detainees till all of a sudden they screamed, "TURN ON THE LIGHT".

They ran and turned the light on, and came to the cell that they stopped at in the hitting process they were doing. A detainee's feet could be seen out of the door to the corridor. We detainees could see a part of the incident by looking in some of the door holes, right and left.

An investigation team came afterwards and took measurements on the ground and talked to the guards then left, the detainee was taken in a hurry and never was seen after that day for another long period of months. Everybody in the camp was talking about it, and the "big event" was that the guards have killed the detainee.

After a long period of time, months or so, we were informed that that detainee was still alive. Some detainees have seen him on a wheel chair - including me - and asked him "What happened? The officers claim that you hanged yourself?"

The detainee answered me "How? All what I remember is that the guards were hitting the brothers in their cells, and all of a sudden in the dark I lost conscious till this day. That person, Mishal Al Harbi, a Saudi detainee in his early 20's is living the rest of his life in a wheel chair and was almost dead on the excuse of suicide. He's now released in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

TWO: A war at Guantanamo

Reasons for deaths, the American Mps would tell us long ago, were that those people who committed suicide were mentally ill, and it's psychological situation.

But that's not true, because the mentally ill people - of which there are few in the camp - have observers. And all tools to kill the self with are taken from them. But those people who died weren't under watch. What made them do it?

In my opinion there may have been a big war started in Guantanamo after the fight in camp four, where the military will take very strict actions against all detainees without thinking of the reasons that made the detainees attack the guards. On the other hand it may be some sort of a personal revenge- the military must have taken actions against the detainees in religion.

They must have done something to the Qur'an, they must've done something to other brothers in a savage way, harmed them physically or sexually.

THREE: "mass suicide" in protest?

The camp in Guantanamo bay is a high security one and there is no chance for detainees to commit suicide. As I have seen myself, they have emergency plans for all of these things. And why three detainees at once?

That gives me a signal that the suicide plan was by at least more than 15 detainees - where the guards could stop most of them but missed three of the detainees, who died.

For sure there are injured people. The American government would not speak about it but spoke about the three deaths that they can't hide.

Those three people who did this, I know them very well. I was next to them while they were on hunger strike and they were on hunger strike till death.

And if nothing happens about Guantanamo (in response to the deaths) there are more people who will do it, and I can tell you who they are.

Finally sorry to say this, but the whole world would say something if it was alive, but the world is dead and not at all alive on this issue.

Abdulla Alnoaimi

Former detainee no 159