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Youngest Guantanamo Detainee Seeks Marriage

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RIYADH — Abdul Salam Al-Shehry was only 15 when he was first detained at Guantanamo Bay. He turned 18 a couple of weeks ago and is the youngest among 124 other Saudi detainees.

The teenage prisoner is being held at the US military detention center, like many, on suspicion of links to radical Muslim groups.

The boy's detention without trial provoked strong criticism from the Committee for the Defense of Guantanamo Detainees headed by Kateb Al-Shammary.

According to a report in January 2004 on BBC, the United States released three teenaged boys who were held in custody at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp in Cuba for more than a year.

The three boys, believed to be aged between 13 and 15, were sent back to their unnamed country of origin. The US Defense Department said the boys no longer posed a threat to the United States and they had no further value as suspects for interrogation.

However, Abdul Salam was not one of the released teenagers.

Gaithan Al-Shehry, Abdul Salam's father, is worried that his son will grow old away from his family.

In his recent letter to his family he asked them to propose to a girl they choose on his behalf. He intends to marry his bride on his release. He was very optimistic in his letter.

Abdul Salam acknowledged in the letter his error and feels guilty going to Afghanistan saying he was not aware of the dangers. He was misled into traveling to Afghanistan and, with no experience to guide him, he ended up in Guantanamo.

In his letter, he stated: "I realized my mistake only after I have left you. Please forgive me."

Lawyer Kateb Al-Shammary confirmed that Abdul Salam's case has been presented to human rights organizations and the International Committee of the Red Cross to help obtain his release. Other detainees, he said, must either be tried and freed or fairly convicted.

Regarding Abdul Salam's intention to get married, Al-Shammary said: "This obviously indicates that he is convinced that he is innocent and had not committed any crime." He added: "The grounds of the arrests were despotic with no legal or humanitarian basis."

Al-Shammary pointed out that two of the Saudi detainees are suffering from health problems, one had his two legs amputated; the other is half paralyzed.

"Abdul Salam and other detainees represent the tragedy that surrounds the Guantanamo detainees," Al-Shammary stated. "They have been secluded under inhuman circumstances for four years. These circumstances do not comply with the international conventions and delegations that preserve an individual's dignity and rights," the lawyer explained.

Al-Shammary clarified that Abdul Salam's arrest was unlawful. When detained, he was 15. Therefore, it was expected that he will be dealt with as a juvenile according to international laws and legislations.

The lawyer demands that Abdul Salam should not be treated like the older detainees who were not pressured or influenced by other individuals or groups to take the road that had led them to imprisonment.