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Family Weeps For Bay Hunger Striker

KANWAL HAMEED
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A 16-year-old Bahraini girl weeps in secret as her father lies wasting away in the US prison camp at Guantanamo Bay.

Hunger striker Essa Al Murbati's wife and five children are also imprisoned, by their misery and the fear that they will never see him again.

"It's as if he is dead," says his 40-year-old wife Elham Ebrahim Khalil.

She has received no correspondence from him in over six months and was sickened to find out he has been on hunger strike since July and is so weak he is being tube-fed by his captors.

"We haven't heard from Essa in over six months," Ms Khalil told the GDN.

"He used to write us letters, but even then he never said much about himself.

"They (the US) also removed lots of words that he wrote.

"In the beginning he used to tell us 'I hope to see you soon', but now all he says is 'I am okay' and he asks about the children.

"It's as if he has died."

The last time she saw her husband was four years ago, before his brother gave him a lift to Bahrain International Airport.

He travelled to Pakistan and later said under questioning that he went for treatment on a medical visa, but was arrested by Pakistani police on arrival.

Mr Al Murbati told interrogators he was abused by the police and signed a statement without reading it.

US authorities claim he travelled to Afghanistan on November 2, 2001 via Pakistan, after being told he would become a better person and have a BD15,000 debt forgiven.

It is alleged that he first went to Kandahar and then Kabul, for weapons training.

Mr Al Murbati is accused of being associated with the separatist group Abu Sayyaf, whose members he allegedly met in the Philippines to discuss channelling money to Arabs in Afghanistan.

He has denied all the allegations.

The US claims he was injured by a grenade while travelling to Khost, Afghanistan.

At one point he allegedly said he was injured in a bus accident, but later said a bomb exploded near him.

Mr Al Murbati allegedly told interrogators he lied because he was afraid.

Ms Khalil learnt about the hunger strike through the GDN last Wednesday and was so upset she could not eat.

"I really feel sad without Essa," she said.

"He's my husband, he's the father of my children and I don't know if I'll ever see him again.

"When I first found out, I felt like I couldn't eat.

"We found out about Essa because my son saw the newspaper in school and told me.

"I bought the paper and my 16-year-old daughter read it at home. She didn't say a word, but the next day I heard her crying in her room."

"The biggest problem is for my kids. There are some children who know their father has died, but for my kids it is as if he has died, but they are still waiting to see him again."

"I write to him, but I don't know if he ever gets the letters," she added.

Ms Khalil said that the family had no information about Essa's condition until the GDN report, in which lawyer Joshua Colangelo-Bryan revealed that Mr Al Murbati was on hunger strike and being tube-fed by his captors.

Mr Colangelo-Bryan heads a team of US lawyers representing the six Bahraini detainees, who have been held at Guantanamo Bay for more than three years without trial. He met Mr Al Murbati and the others in a visit to the maximum-security prison camp on October 15.

Mr Al Murbati, who begun his hunger strike in July, had lost a lot of weight and looked "exhausted", said Mr Colangelo-Bryan.

Ms Khalil and her children, three sons and two daughters, have suffered emotionally and financially since Mr Al Murbati's arrest.

"Nowadays I give all my time to my children - I don't work," said Ms Khalil.

"I have to be their mother and their father. Essa used to provide for us, but since he has gone we are being looked after by his family and my family."

Some societies in Bahrain also provide the family with aid, she said.

"We have five children here, the eldest is 16 and the youngest is nine," said Ms Khalil.

"The little ones don't really know what has happened, but I know the elder two do. But they will never talk about it.

"Especially my eldest girl, she was 12 when she last saw her father. I know it upsets her, but she doesn't like to talk about it. She's just so quiet."

This month completes four years since Ms Al Khalil last saw her husband.

"It's hard to even remember the last time I saw him," she said.

"I remember I didn't take him to the airport, his brother did. Now I regret that, I wish I had taken him, but I couldn't drive then.

'I only learned to drive after he was captured, because I had to.'

Their parting words are burned into Ms Al Khalil's memory.

"The last thing he said to me was: 'Take care of the children and I'll see you soon.'

"But he has not come back still."

Life for all these years has been misery for Ms Khalil, who is kept going by her love for her children.

"I don't even like to leave the house these days," she said.

"I don't really feel like doing anything anymore. I just try to be strong for my children."

Ms Khalil has never been formally told what her husband is accused of, but is convinced he is innocent.

"He is my husband and I know him," she said.

"I am sure he is innocent. I know he wouldn't hurt anyone."

The other five Bahraini detainees are Juma Mohammed Al Dossary, Salah Abdul Rasool Al Blooshi, Adel Kamel Hajee, Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa and Majid Al Naimi.