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## Hunger Strikers at Guantanamo

Letters to the Editor  
The New York Times  
February 15, 2006

To the Editor:

United States military authorities are wrong to conclude that the hunger-striking detainees at Guantanamo must be force-fed to prevent them from committing suicide.

The hunger strikers do not want to die. Their goal is not suicide but to change the inhumane conditions at the prison.

The United States should focus on bringing procedures at Guantanamo into conformance with international human rights law, not on developing novel coercive techniques to break the hunger strikes.

*Michael A. Grodin, M.D.*

*George J. Annas*

*Boston*

*The writers are co-founders of Global Lawyers and Physicians; Mr. Annas is chairman of the department of health law, bioethics and human rights, Boston University School of Public Health.*

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To the Editor:

Re "Tough U.S. Steps in Hunger Strike at Camp in Cuba" (front page, Feb. 9):

Buried inside your article about force-feeding hunger strikers at Guantanamo Bay is pivotal information that should give all Americans pause.

The Defense Department has concluded that fewer than half of the detainees at Guantanamo acted against the United States, and fewer than one in 10 fought for Al Qaeda. Nonetheless, these prisoners are being held indefinitely without proper judicial recourse.

Surely there must be a better way to secure the country, without disgracing our best traditions.

*Ira Katznelson*

*New York*

*The writer is a professor of political science and history at Columbia University.*

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To the Editor:

The Defense Department's medical personnel are violating every canon of medical ethics in their treatment of hunger strikers at Guantanamo.

In December, the commander of the hospital there, Capt. John S. Edmondson, acknowledged in a letter to one of us (Dr. Nicholl) that conditions essential to enable prisoners to decide freely whether to go on a hunger strike, including a noncoercive environment and the ability to consult with their families, were not being met.

Now the situation is even worse, as the prisoners have been deprived of access to the courts.

Instead of using brutal and painful methods to force-feed the prisoners, the Pentagon should enable the prisoners to have independent medical examinations and advice to enable them make informed decisions affecting their health.

Once made, those decisions should be respected.

*Holly G. Atkinson, M.D.*

*David Nicholl, M.D.*

*Michael Wilks, M.D.*

*The writers are, respectively, president of Physicians for Human Rights; consultant neurologist, City Hospital, Birmingham, England; and chairman, Medical Ethics Committee, British Medical Association.*