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Writing by Suicidal Detainee Reveals Depths of His Despair

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Just before Jumah al-Dossari tried to kill himself by fashioning a makeshift noose and opening a gash in his right arm, the Guantanamo Bay detainee handed his lawyer an envelope containing pages of tidily handwritten Arabic, some stained with dried blood. Dossari had told his lawyer they could discuss the letter at a later time.

"The detainees are suffering from the bitterness of despair, the detention humiliation and the vanquish of slavery and suppression," Dossari wrote, according to a translation. "I hope you will always remember that you met and sat with a 'human being' called 'Jumah' who suffered too much and was abused in his belief, self, dignity and also in his humanity. He was imprisoned, tortured and deprived from his homeland, his family and his young daughter who is in the most need of him for four years . . . with no reason or crime committed."

The letter is a rare personal glimpse into the desperation some detainees at the U.S. detention facility in Cuba feel, and an emotional account of one man's turmoil and ultimate decision to die rather than stay in prison another day. Dossari's October suicide attempt -- one of nearly a dozen times he has tried to kill himself in his four years on the island -- failed because his lawyer, Joshua Colangelo-Bryan, discovered him bleeding and hanging limp in a cell where he was supposed to be on a bathroom break.

Dossari, 32, a Bahraini national, tried to kill himself twice after the October attempt, telling his lawyers that the indefinite nature of his detention and his lack of interaction with other people were causing him a deepening depression.

"There was no other alternative to make our voice heard by the world from the depths of the detention centers except this way in order for the world to reexamine its standing and for the fair people of America to look again at the situation and try to have a moment of truth with themselves," Dossari wrote. "When you remember me in my last gasps of life before dying, while my soul is leaving my body to rise to its creator, remember that the world let us and our case down. Remember that our governments let us down."

Dossari wrote that he believes he and other detainees "were captured, tortured and detained with no offense or reason."

The U.S. military, however, thinks Dossari is a terrorist with ties to al-Qaeda, and he has been deemed an enemy combatant. U.S. officials cite Dossari's alleged ties to terrorist cells in the United States and they think he was at Tora Bora, an al-Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan, before his arrest.

Lt. Col. Jeremy Martin, a Guantanamo Bay spokesman, said Dossari can interact with other detainees and exercise, and has access to religious items, books, magazines and writing material as well as medical and behavioral professionals. Martin also emphasized that abuse is not tolerated at the facility.

"Claims of detainee abuse and torture are documented al-Qaeda tactics, used to manipulate the media and bring pressure on the United States Government for their release," Martin said in an e-mail response to questions.

Colangelo-Bryan said Dossari handed him the envelope during their October meeting and tried to kill himself moments later in another room. After the suicide attempt, the lawyer opened the letter, which included another sheet of paper covered in dried blood that the government has not cleared for release.

"I think it expresses his utter lack of hope and his sense of complete powerlessness, and that he decided that the only way he could reclaim himself at all as a human being was by killing himself," Colangelo-Bryan said.

Dossari ended his letter by saying that he saw "death looming."

"Farewell . . . farewell with no hope of seeing me again," he wrote. "I thank you for everything you have done for me, but I have a final request. Show the world the letters I gave you, let the world read them, let the world know the agony of the detainees in Cuba."