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## **Guantánamo Detainees Ignored by the Government**

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"We want Yemen's government to react," says Tina Foster, attorney from the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York. "So far, this government has not done anything to get their countrymen home from Guantánamo."

Tina Foster and other US attorneys representing detainees at Guantánamo are visiting Arab countries to make people aware of the continuous illegal acts of the US government. Now they are in Yemen to talk to detainees' families and give them an update on the cases. But the visit is equally a matter of trying to get the Yemeni government to put pressure on the Bush administration to release the 120 Yemeni men who are still detained at Guantánamo. On Jan 28, the Yemeni National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms (HOOD) held a press conference with the attorneys at Yemen Times' offices to discuss the prisoners' present situation.

"We were here in Yemen six months ago on the same mission, and we will keep coming back until we get the men released," says Tina Foster. "We are fighting this battle on two fronts. We are fighting in the courts of law and we are fighting in the courts of public opinion. For our clients to be allowed fair trials and human rights, we need the back up of the public. The Arab people must put pressure on their governments to get their countrymen home".

### **Detained again**

So far, five Yemenis have been released from the camp. Rumours of the release of an additional 13 Yemeni prisoners have not been confirmed.

But being released from Guantánamo does not mean that the troubles are over. In Yemen, the five released men are now withheld in prison. They are still waiting to go to trial. Still waiting to come home to their families.

Even though these men are not technically clients, the lawyers hope to visit them within the next couple of days.

"Everyone who comes out of Guantánamo has our interest. We want them all to be treated fairly. We want them to be safe," says Tina Foster.

Khaled Al-Anesi, lawyer and executive manager of HOOD, says: "When the detainees are released from Guantánamo and return to Yemen, it is illegal under Yemeni law to detain them again in this way. These men are now living under worse circumstances than at Guantánamo."

According to Al-Anesi, the government is detaining the men in accordance with the wishes of the Bush administration.

Zaki Zehawi, attorney from the Federal Defenders of San Diego, agrees: "It seems that Arab authorities are bowing to the US government. We are surprised that this does not create an outrage in the Arab world."

And yet, not all detainees get this treatment after being released. One month ago, three Bahraini men were released from Guantánamo. When they returned to Bahrain, they were questioned for a few hours and then allowed to go home to their families. None of them were further imprisoned.

"We would like to see the same thing happen here in Yemen," says Tina Foster.

### **Closing the camp**

One reason why some are being detained in their own countries is that the US government might have plans to close Guantánamo down. Tina Foster believes that in order to make the initial withholding of the men look convincing, the Bush administration requires Arab governments to detain the men who are released from Guantánamo to make them look guilty. This way of keeping up appearances would also help explain the slow progress in having people released from the camp in the first place.

"For four years, the US government has been saying that all the men at Guantánamo are dangerous. So of course it looks bad if they release them all at once and close down the place. This is probably why they pressure other governments to detain them in their home countries, so they look guilty and dangerous. Even though they are not," she says.

According to Tina Foster, US government officials have admitted that out of the approximately 500 detainees, only 20 have the actual interest of the US government.

### **Guantánamo is a symbol**

The case of Guantánamo is unique in more ways than one. On December 30 of last year, a new law was passed that made it even more so. This law states that the men at Guantánamo do not have the right to come to a US court to challenge their detention. Instead, the US military will act as the judge. Without lawyers. Without presentation of evidence. Without basic human rights.

The attorneys are presently challenging the new law in order to get the cases tried in a proper court.

"Nothing like this has ever happened before," says Tina Foster. "Guantánamo is not only about these 500 men. It is a symbol of the Bush administration's illegal acts around the world. If they are able to get away with what is happening at Guantánamo, it means that they can take anyone from any part of the world, lock them up, torture them or even kill them, and never have to explain why they do so. We have to stop them now."

All the attorneys working with the Guantánamo detainees are volunteers. Some are working with non profit organizations, others with private law firms that take on the cases without charge. When asked if the lack of salary is part of the reason for the slow progress, attorney Heather Rogers from the Federal Defenders of San Diego, answers: "Belief in ideals is a much stronger motivation than money. We are all driven toward justice and no matter how long it takes, we will make progress. We will be heard".