

Guantánamo: 22 Years of Imprisonment without End... for 30 People

January 12,
2024

January 11 marked 22 years since the U.S. opened its notorious detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba in 2002. At one point, roughly 770 prisoners were held there. In 2024, 30 people remain in indefinite detention. Sixteen have been cleared for release but remain imprisoned. Only ten have charges pending against them, one is serving a life sentence after being convicted, and three are considered “forever detainees” (New York Times, 12/11/23).

Thus, over 95% of the detainees have been released, often after spending more than a decade in the detention facility, due to there being little to no evidence that they posed a threat or were linked with terrorism. Some of those facing charges will likely not be convicted because much of the evidence against them was obtained through torture (NPR, 11/14/19), which then continued at Guantánamo in the form of the force feeding of hunger strikers. At least nine detainees have died in custody (Reprieve.org, 8/19/18). Guantánamo’s oldest inmate Saifullah Paracha was finally released in 2022 at age 75.

Developments in 2023 include the first-ever visit from a UN human rights investigator, who said the conditions were “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment under international law” (Associated Press, June 26). Also, one prisoner, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, was declared unfit to face charges because he was rendered psychotic by his treatment by the US (AP, September 22).

Many of the torture techniques were confirmed in the 2014 Senate report on post-9/11 CIA “interrogations.” The non-governmental organization Reprieve noted in 2018: “The vast majority of detainees in Guantánamo (86%) were not captured by US forces. Instead the Government filled the prison with people they bought for bounties. The US flew planes over parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan offering \$5,000 for any ‘suspicious person.’ This amounted to approximately seven years’ average salary for most people in the area, encouraging them to turn over innocent men in exchange for a life-changing amount of money. Since then, it has turned out they got it wrong most of the time. It didn’t even take long for those in charge to see their mistake— as early as 2002, Guantánamo’s operational commander complained that he was being sent too many ‘Mickey Mouse’ detainees.”

The prison has become a political football, with President Obama promising to close it as he entered office in 2009 but never doing so, President Trump pledging to “fill it up with bad guys” but instead releasing one person. While President Biden has accepted Congressional restrictions which prevent him from using funds to close down the prison (Stars and Stripes, 12/29/21), he again expressed concerns about a provision in the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act which bars funds from being used to transfer prisoners to the US (EFE, December 23).

Guantánamo has been referred to as “the most expensive prison on earth.” The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) estimates the prison costs \$540 million per year to operate, or over \$13 million per detainee. The *New York Times* in 2019 (September 16) said that in 2012 the per-prisoner cost at a “SuperMax” prison in Colorado was \$78,000 a year, and estimated running Guantánamo cost \$7 billion since it opened. While this is a drop in the bucket of the \$8 trillion that the “War on Terror” has cost since 2001 (Watson Institute, September, 2021), it is a waste of taxpayer money and a blight on a country that claims to believe in the rule of law.

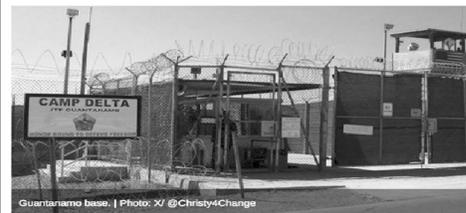
Amnesty International (AI), the Center for Constitutional Rights, and others continue to call for the prison to be shut down. AI notes that “the existence of an offshore prison for Muslim men who are denied due process of law is a blatant example and encouragement of Islamophobia and racism.”

On Jan. 11, 2024, Witness Against Torture, AI, Center for Victims of Torture, and others held a rally at the White House calling to shut Guantánamo down.

The US has only brought one prisoner from Guantánamo to the US for trial (the *Guardian*, 7/10/18). All the other inmates are being held with no end in sight on the island of Cuba without prosecution. Holding detainees indefinitely without charge or trial is an unacceptable violation of human rights and only serves to inspire backlash against the United States in acts of violence which are considered terrorism. Keeping the prison open is making us less safe, not more secure. It is far past time to shut Guantánamo down!

Local groups organizing the January 12, 2024 Portland action include the Peace and Justice Works (PJW) Iraq Affinity Group and Amnesty International Group 48 (Portland).

Guantánamo: 21 Years of Frustrated Search for Justice



Guantánamo base. | Photo: X/Christy4Change

The United Nations Human Rights Committee expressed concern about the lack of a planned closure date for the facilities

More than two decades after Guantánamo received its first detainees in 2002, this U.S. prison on Cuban soil continues to grapple with the challenge of delivering justice.

“Guantánamo is a symbol of what not to do,” summarizes the coordinator of the defense teams at the base, Brigadier General Jackie Thompson

Telesur
November 7, 2023

This flyer was prepared
in January, 2024 by the

Peace and Justice Works Iraq Affinity Group

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Meetings usually 2nd Mondays, 5 PM; next one is February 12.

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Contact us about our meetings!