

January 7,
2022

20 Years Into the "War On Terror," It's Way Past Time to Close Guantánamo

January 11 will mark exactly 20 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 2022, 39 people remain in indefinite detention. In those 20 years, only eight people were ever convicted of crimes (Center for Constitutional Rights, October 2021)— and three of those convictions were overturned (ACLU.org, May 2018).

Nearly all of the original 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. For many of the remaining 39, the U.S. doesn't have enough evidence to bring them to court, but still considers them too dangerous to release. Some of these cases would fall apart at trial because much of the evidence against them was obtained in part through torture (NPR, November 14, 2019), which then continued at Guantánamo in the form of the force feeding of hunger strikers. Most of those remaining are considered "forever prisoners," which means most have de facto life sentences without having faced trial. Thirteen of the 39 have been cleared for release, but President Joe Biden has revealed no plans to free them (Amnesty International, December 13). At least nine detainees have died in custody (Reprieve.org, 8/19/18).

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 actually releasing one person, and when President Biden signed the new National Defense Authorization Act on December 27, he accepted a provision that prevents him from using funds to close down the prison (Stars and Stripes, December 29) .

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 Tuesday (Jan. 11, 2022), Witness Against Torture, AI, CCR, and others are holding a virtual rally at 11 AM Pacific Time called "Disrupt, Confront and Close Guantánamo" (facebook.com/events/1347700772349653).

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 indefinitely in an off-shore prison without prosecution. Holding detainees indefinitely without charge or trial at the detention facility is an unacceptable violation of human rights and only serves to inspire backlash against the United States in acts of so-called "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 7, 2022 Portland action include the Peace and Justice Works (PJW) Iraq Affinity Group and Amnesty International Group 48 (Portland).



Protestors outside the first Congressional hearing on Guantánamo since 2013, held December 7, 2021

This flyer was prepared
in January, 2022 by the

Peace and Justice Works Iraq Affinity Group

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Meetings usually 2nd Tuesdays, 7 PM; next one is January 11.

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Contact us about our meetings!