

Guantánamo and Strange Associations

By Patty Guerrero

Everyone knows about Guantánamo. Everyone knows about the hunger strikes. Everyone knows that President Obama has said, twice now, that he wants to close Guantánamo.

So, where are we now in this absurdity?



Activists posed as Guantamo prisoners outside the Minneapolis Convention Center when Dick Cheney was honored as a guest speaker at the American Thoracic Surgeons meeting.

Well, Guantánamo is still open and there are still 166 prisoners, with over 100 on a hunger strike, and at least 40 are being force-fed. They would rather die than remain in this state of humiliation and suffering. Eighty-six were cleared for release long ago, but does anyone care?

Why won't President Obama make the call to end force-feeding? This is what one person said in his comment on an article about this form of torture: "Because then he'd have to let them die, or let them go. He'd rather not make those choices. One would bring down his own supporters on him in a whole new way, and the other would be a Willie Horton type extravaganza for the Republicans. He is afraid to make this choice. That is cowardly and wrong but those are his reasons. He's our

President. He wanted the job. That means he has to make these hard calls and take the consequences. He has to trust the American people for better or worse.”

These men are human beings and have suffered immeasurably.

Another quote, by M. Cherif Bassiouni, emeritus professor of law, DePaul University College of Law:

The question of torture is not something abstract, it is an international crime under U.S. law for which all perpetrators are subject to prosecution and, if found guilty, to punishment, including those medical personnel who participate in such acts (which is also a violation of their Hippocratic Oath and in violation of the “Nuremburg principles”). All such concerned persons should know that obedience to superior orders is not a defense when the order is manifestly unlawful.

The time to stop these illegal practices has long been upon us, the political will of a few has overcome the good will of the many in this country. All legal avenues through U.S. courts seem to be blocked, for the moment.”



Protest signs at Condoleezza Rice event

The men in Guantánamo have suffered for many years—some have died by their own hands, and some have been murdered. One man, Shaker Aamer, 47 years old and father of four, the youngest of whom he has never seen, has said that he is losing his mind and losing his life inside the high-security prison. He has been there for 11 years and was cleared for release in 2007. He quotes George Orwell: “The system is for the system, the torture is for the torture.” And, he asks, “Is Obama a man of his word or is he a liar? How does he want to be judged?”

Apparently the Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid Society and Hennepin County Lawyers Association are not worried about being judged. They invited Condoleezza Rice, national security advisor and secretary of state for George W. Bush as their “honored” guest for their annual fundraiser on May 23. She spoke on the topic, “Why

Democracy Matters.” Pulleeze! (Dick Cheney was also in Minneapolis recently as the “honored” guest speaking at a meeting of a professional medical organization, the American Association for Thoracic Surgery.) No one has been able to figure out this invitation to Ms. Rice, since if not for her (and Cheney), there probably would not even be any hunger strikers, let alone a Guantánamo. Do the Legal Aid and the Hennepin County Lawyers people think Ms. Rice’s shameful legacy is something that can be ignored in the name of fundraising? Are these people forgetting why they became lawyers in the first place?

One member of Hennepin County Lawyers Association has stated that he admires Ms. Rice for what she did during her time as Secretary of State. But, then he said “I believe in redemption.” Redemption for whom? The detainees, some of whom never even did anything? Maybe he believes Rice, et al, are redeemable? Well, maybe they are.

Tackling Torture at the Top (T3), a committee of WAMM, was at both of the occasions, protesting, but the shows went on. At the Condi protest we passed out letters that the attendees could send to any of the prisoners—all 166 names and the address at Guantánamo. Many of the attendees were happy to take the handouts, and many snubbed their noses. But at least we were there to tell people that their guest for the evening is a war criminal and to point out the irony of law associations that have seemingly forgotten about a war that caused many deaths and cost at least three trillion dollars.

Patty Guerrero is an active member of the Tackling Torture at the Top (T3) Committee of Women Against Military Madness, as well as the WAMM Newsletter Committee.