

## Who Will Take the Prisoners?

Adapted from a proposal by sociologist and activist Don Irish

Certainly, you are well aware of the captives being held for years by our government in Guantánamo, Cuba, without having been charged with any crimes. A number have been engaged in a hunger strike, the only means they have left to protest their unwarranted continued imprisonment. Our nation is violating international laws and Geneva Convention principles in its actions. That brutality is terrorism. Our president has stated that he will “close out” that facility. He has not done so. These captives are confronting their deaths. What can we try to do?



Samir Naji al Hasan Moqbel. “We are human. They ought not to treat us this way.”  
Photo: U.S. Army

Historically there have been groups of people who have rallied numerous times in order to “do the right thing.” Prison conditions, as bad as they are now, were worse when some people rallied for better conditions in our early colonies. The Underground Railroad in the South provided vital, needed housing and food for slaves escaping captivity. In 1917, after World War I, Quakers provided for sick and undernourished children in Germany. During and after World War II, Quakers aided refugees coming from Germany to the United States (for which they were awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace). Latin Americans, fleeing from their dictators to cross the border into our U.S. and Canada, were aided by various groups and individuals.

Can we now challenge the failure of our government? We could help the men in Guantánamo renew their hope and end their fasting. Could a movement begin (it should have begun long ago) whereby each of these men could be “adopted” for a limited period with certain understandings, until they are able to enter a country of their own choosing, if it’s not possible for them to enter immediately? These men are not terrorists. They have been kept in prison for more than a decade, lacking family contacts, with little legal recourse or adequate personal care. Isn’t it likely that they would appreciate being released from their “dungeons”?

Some are physically handicapped, others may be mentally broken; some both. Some of the men most probably will need specialized health care for physical and psychological problems. The U.S. federal government should provide information and medical specialists should be called upon, paid for by the U.S. The United States should pay for all their care so that it is not to be a burden on voluntary “hosts.” The federal government has already been providing their food, health and other expenses all along at Guantánamo, so it would not be adding to the costs of keeping them. Nongovernmental groups should do what we can—churches, civic groups, etc.

There will be a need for evaluation of those who volunteer to accept each one of the men as a “new friend” in their lives. Granted, it is premature for an initial proposal like this to have all the answers.

A national movement such as this to terminate the captivity of these men who have been charged with no crimes will push President Obama to act on what he has said he “intends to do.” The most important thing is to save the lives of the captives. Obama has the power to devise or accept whatever solutions may aid in resolving the problem. Public news about solutions will hearten the men in prison and make it easier for the president. This is a humane concern, not a political one. This is not protecting terrorists, but releasing these men who have never been charged.

Who among us is willing and able to befriend and assist one of these victims who have suffered because of inhumane U.S. policy?

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