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Court Orders Release of 17 Innocent Guantanamo Detainees into U.S. After Nearly Seven Years in Prison

Tallahassee and D.C. Religious and Community Leaders Offer Plan for Men's Support

October 7, 2008, New York – Today, for the first time, a federal court ordered the release into the United States of 17 innocent Uighur men who have been imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay for nearly seven years. The men are refugees who would face persecution and imprisonment, if not death, if returned to their native China.

“In the history of our Republic, the military never imprisoned any man so harshly, and for so long, let alone men who are not the enemy. We have broken faith with the rule of law, and been untrue to the generosity of spirit that is our national character,” said **Sabin Willett, Partner at Bingham McCutchen who argued the case for the detainees today.**

“This is a historic day for the U.S. Finally, we are beginning the process of taking responsibility for our mistakes and fixing them,” said **CCR Attorney Emi MacLean.** “For years, the United States has begged other countries to clean up the mess we made in Guantanamo, but the hypocrisy of this appeal was evident abroad. Perhaps now other countries will be less reluctant to come to our aid.” MacLean continued, “Allowing these wrongfully detained men a fresh start would also provide the U.S. a fresh start – an opportunity to turn a page and finally take a position of leadership in closing Guantanamo.”

Religious and community leaders from both Tallahassee, Florida and the Washington D.C. area offered to the court detailed plans for the support of the men, from housing and counseling to employment and car insurance. In this stunning show of goodwill and solidarity, 20 leaders from faith-based communities in Tallahassee, Florida, and a network of refugee resettlement agencies and other religious groups, have pledged to help settle the men in local communities. Many members of the Uighur community came to court today to lend support.

Said Mr. Willett, “The volunteers who come to court today from church and community, from synagogue and mosque to offer sanctuary to these men bear true faith to that character, and give us hope that the better angel of our nature can yet return.”

On the day of the hearing, Congressmen Bill Delahunt (D-MA) and Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) also reiterated their June call for the U.S. to grant protection to the imprisoned Uighurs.

The 17 men currently imprisoned at Guantanamo left China amid increasing political oppression and found their way to Afghanistan, where they lived in small Uighur communities. In late 2001, they were forced to flee the aerial bombardment of the surrounding areas. Eventually, they made their way to Pakistan in the belief that they would be safer there. After crossing into Pakistan, the Uighurs were welcomed and fed by Pakistani villagers who then turned them over for generous bounties offered by the United States.

Last week, after years of litigation, the U.S. government finally conceded that none of these men would be treated as “enemy combatants.” All were cleared for release long ago. However, because of the stigma of their detention at Guantánamo and for fear of offending China, no other country had agreed to offer these men safe haven. Despite this failure to find a third country to take them, the government argued that the court could not release them into the U.S. and, therefore, that the men would have to stay at Guantanamo indefinitely.

For more information on the Uighurs’ story, [click here](#).

CCR has led the legal battle over Guantanamo for the last six years – sending the first ever habeas attorney to the base and sending the first attorney to meet with a former CIA “ghost detainee.” CCR has been responsible for organizing and coordinating more than 500 pro bono lawyers across the country in order to represent the men at Guantanamo, ensuring that nearly all have the option of legal representation. CCR represented the detainees with co-counsel in the most recent argument before the Supreme Court in 2007.

The Center for Constitutional Rights is dedicated to advancing and protecting the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Founded in 1966 by attorneys who represented civil rights movements in the South, CCR is a non-profit legal and educational organization committed to the creative use of law as a positive force for social change. www.ccrjustice.org.