

Beat: Politics

LETTER TO AMERICAN MUSLIMS ABOUT THE CLOSURE OF GUANTANAMO BAY

14 YEARS AFTER THE PRISON WAS OPENED

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USPA NEWS - I came to Cuba to attend the 4th fourth International Seminar for Peace and the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases and to advocate for the closure of Guantanamo Bay. This call comes almost 14 years after the prison was opened, after Obama repeatedly stated his intention to close it...

I came to Cuba to attend the 4th fourth International Seminar for Peace and the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases and to advocate for the closure of Guantanamo Bay. This call comes almost 14 years after the prison was opened, after Obama repeatedly stated his intention to close it, and while 107 prisoners still languish behind bars. The letter below is one I wrote in response to the absence of American Muslim voices in the movement to close Guantanamo Bay, while occupying a camp site close to the gates of the U.S. Naval Base that houses this notorious prison.

Assalamu Alaikum Dear American Muslim Community, I write this message to you from Guantanamo City, Cuba, less than 15 miles away from the U.S. Naval Base on which the infamous prison that tortures our brothers sits. I write this message to you after traveling for 36 hours to get here at the top of a mountain with little communication with the outside world. I write this to you after taking several taxis, planes, and buses just to be in close proximity to our Muslim brothers whose innocent lives have been destroyed. I write to you now because the distance I traveled, constitutes nothing in comparison to the pain and suffering that our brothers in Guantanamo have experienced.

I write this message to you now, because Guantanamo Bay prison exists as the epitome of the world's evil and the lengths to which the U.S. will go to destroy the spirit of our faith and the faith of our people. I write this message to you now, because it is impossible to capture the beauty of Cuba and the culture in Guantanamo City without simultaneously hearing the cries and screams of our brothers close by.

I write to you now because it is in being here that the privileging of state rights over human rights has become so clear. I write to you now because it is in being here that I realize that our Muslim bodies are collateral damage at the nexus of imperialism and anti-Muslim bigotry. I write to you now because all I have is the power of the pen.

I write this to you now, because, I can't not write it to you now. I write to you now because I can't stay silent sitting so close to the gates of Guantanamo Bay prison. I write this to you now because I am traveling with 13 amazing individuals; only one of whom is Muslim.

I write this to you now because I mourn the fact that I have to write because I cannot see you here. I write this to you now because I can't return to the United States and face the fact that the American Muslim community will stay silent when our Muslim brothers have no voice in the gates of hell. I write this to you now desperately hoping that something will change. That when I come back, I will see that we value our lives as much as our lives have been devalued.

I write this to you now, because I have a dream that when I return, we will rise up together and take back our rights. That we will collectively decide that we have had enough. That we have had enough begging for seats at the table. That we have had enough of begging for different yet equally egregious surveillance methods. That we have had enough of trying to convince our government that our youth aren't terrorists in training. That we've had enough of seeing our fathers, brothers, and sons go to prison for crimes they didn't commit. That we've had enough of watching mothers struggle to keep their families afloat in the face of government persecution.

I write this to you now, because I know somewhere deep down that we value our humanity as much as the humanity of others. I write this to you now because it is time for us to stop begging and start demanding. I write this to you now, because I hope you will listen.

Your sister in Islam,

Dr. Maha Hilal, writing from Guantanamo City, Cuba

Dr. Maha Hilal is the Executive Director of the National Coalition to Protect Civil Freedoms, an organization dedicated to addressing civil and human rights abuses related to preemptive prosecutions and thoughts crimes in the War on Terror.

She is also an Islamophobia consultant for the Team Baluchi Defense Team of the Office of the Chief of Defense, where she supports research on disparities in the legal system that Muslims face, such as selective prosecutions. Lastly, Maha is currently a Career Development Officer with the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition where she helps survivors obtain meaningful employment.

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