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“AS THE FATHER OF A YOUNG SON, I WENT TO THE WHITE HOUSE ON MARCH 19TH TO BE A VOICE FOR SHAHIDULLAH.” From the closing argument of Defendant Art Laffin in DC Superior Court.

Yesterday marked a watershed day in my 27 year legal career. It did not occur as I deftly cross-examined a witness, nor while waxing eloquent in front of a jury. Rather, it transpired as I sat in the back row of courtroom 219 in the DC Superior Court while watching and listening to the final day of testimony and closing arguments at a trial where 19 American citizens argued for justice. Notwithstanding that they were the ones on trial, the justice they pleaded for was not for themselves, and it never would be. Rather, the group’s cry was brought in the names of people half a world away, and the ultimate justice sought at the trial was a simple one: Stop killing them. Stop killing them.

Last March 19th, these 19 people wanted to talk to their president. They had a grievance with him and they went to his house to address it. In the airing of the grievance, the Park Police of the District of Columbia arrested this group of people for all manner of disorderly-ness, nuisance, not acting in obeisance, and generally getting in the way of life as it is known outside the fence surrounding 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. But the group’s message would not be deterred and the arrest and trial of these 19 individuals brought to the public forum this week the voices of those who are, indeed, the actual victims of what it means to be unlawfully prosecuted, with the president of this nation acting as judge, jury and executioner.

On March 19, 2011, on what was the beginning of the ninth year of America’s criminal war of aggression against the sovereign nation of Iraq, and well into the 10th year of this country’s annihilation of Afghanistan, the honored and honorable group Veterans For Peace, organized and led a day of protest at the White House. In all, the Park Police arrested 133 people that day for various and petty misdemeanors in alleged contravention of the Code of Federal Regulation. While drones and Apache helicopter gunships were busily raining down death from the skies above Afghanistan that day without fear or risk of prosecution for untold and innumerable violations of international law, the Park Police were assuring that not a picture-postcard moment

was lost in front of the White House as they arrested those who might have momentarily interfered with that shameful snapshot of America.

Of the 133 who were arrested that day for even attempting to redress their grievances at the White House, only 19 actually went to trial to challenge and otherwise bring into the public consciousness the corrupt and psychotic use of the laws used to attempt to corral and silence them and their message. Greater still, 19 citizens took their cases to trial to witness and to say the words out loud in a court of law and on the public record which must never be stopped being said: STOP KILLING THEM.

The 19 Defendants in this matter represented themselves. Although three outstanding and dedicated attorneys acted as their advisors, it was the accused themselves who challenged the government of the District of Columbia on factual, legal, evidentiary, and moral grounds at every turn. They examined and cross-examined and did all the things a lawyer usually does at trial. They did not argue that they were above the law, only that the correct law needed to be applied...the law which obligated them to risk arrest and jail in the first instance in order to be a voice for the countless number of people whose lives, homes, jobs, and families this country has destroyed and continues to destroy to this day, far far above the law.

One of the Defendants, Art Laffin, prepared and gave one of the closing arguments at the end of the trial yesterday. He kindly provided me with a copy of it for this article so that the message that these selfless 19 people brought to the courtroom this week could be shared with others. In reciting his closing argument, Art's humility, humanity, and gentle spirit put truth on the table for all to see and hear. As stated above, I was never more proud to be in a courtroom than I was yesterday.

Here are his words, in relevant part:

"Thank you Judge Canan for your patience in hearing our case. We come before you as a group rich in diversity from different walks of life, including seven veterans, among whom are several Vietnam combat veterans and a WWII veteran. It is truly a great honor for me to be associated with such a distinguished group of co-defendants, as well as our exceptional advisory counsel, Ann Wilcox, Debbie Anderson and Mark Goldstone.

Our March 19 action at the White House, led by Veterans for Peace, is rooted in a long tradition of nonviolent dissent and resistance, dating back to biblical times and up through our own American history, including the abolitionist movement, the suffragist movement, the union movement, the civil rights movements, the anti-Vietnam war movement, and multiple other social justice movements. We act in the nonviolent tradition of people like Jesus, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Caesar Chavez and Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker of which I am a member.

The evidence you have heard from defendants in our case is compelling. You have heard testimony regarding what we did at the White House on March 19, the beginning of 9th year of the US invasion of Iraq. The Gov't has failed to prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt that we violated the statutes of "failure to obey a lawful order" and "disorderly conduct."

With respect to the "disorderly conduct-blocking passage charge," each defense witness testified that they did not obstruct, block, or incommode anyone. Those of us on trial, never physically impeded or blocked any pedestrians, despite repeated claims by the government that we did so. As March 19 was a Saturday, it was not a work day. There was ample space for anyone wishing to walk on the sidewalk to do so. Lt. Lechance's testimony supports this fact when he said that pedestrians could walk throughout the plaza in front of the White House. He also testified that the White House sidewalk was 35 feet wide and that the majority of people on the White House sidewalk were close to the White House fence. Mr. Carlyle, Mr. Wenk, Ms. Nichalson and Mr. Elliott, all testified that there was sufficient space on the WH sidewalk portion of the White House plaza for anyone else, apart from our group, who wished to be there.

The government repeatedly has claimed that we obstructed people. Lt. Lechance testified that the large crowd obstructed people. But he never said that he saw any defendant individually block or obstruct anyone. Moreover, the government has failed to produce any evidence regarding specific individuals who said they were obstructed by any of the defendants on the White House plaza.

With respect to the "failure to obey a lawful order" charge, you heard testimony that our actions were in accordance with the First Amendment to petition the government for a redress of grievances. You heard defense witnesses say that this was our sole purpose for being on the White House sidewalk.

With respect to our violating 36 CFR 7.96 (5) (E) (viii), the government has failed to prove the

central element of this provision: that we defendants were stationary holding a sign when we were arrested. Both Lt. Lechance and Officer Crowley testified that they saw none of the defendants being stationary and holding sign prior to their arrest.

With respect to the defense assertion regarding the selective enforcement of regulations on the WH sidewalk, I want to reiterate that many of us on trial here have witnessed tour groups, school groups and other groups being stationary on the WH sidewalk with signs or banners and never even be approached by Park Police, let alone be threatened with arrest. I personally want to attest to the fact that several years ago, I was part of a group praying around a cross on Good Friday for one hour in the picture post card area on the WH sidewalk and we were not arrested.

I would now like to address the defense assertion that we acted lawfully on March 19 at the White House.

As was stated in our pre-trial motion by Mr. Duffee and opening statement by Mr. Barrows, and by defense witnesses, International laws and treaties which the U.S. signed, have been, and continues to be blatantly violated. The Nuremberg Principles, which the United States helped write, state that individuals have a duty to prevent crimes against humanity from occurring and that if people don't act to prevent such crimes, they are actually complicit in them. Mr. Elliott just offered eloquent testimony in this regard. We, who are on trial today, along with many others, including our friends here in court to support us, refuse to be complicit in these crimes.

We acted lawfully, in accordance with International laws and treaties. International law is an integral part of U.S. constitutional & domestic law. Treaties and international executive agreements such as the UN Charter & Nuremberg Charter are "the supreme law of the land" under Article VI of the U.S. Constitution and are binding on every US court, including this one. When US government and military officials commit acts of aggression like in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, that clearly violate the U.S. Constitution, we, as citizens, have a duty and responsibility to address it. We emphasize that our intent on March 19 was not to commit a crime but to prevent a crime, to keep the law not break the law. Judge Canan, although you have ruled that International law is not a valid defense in this case, we ask you to please reconsider your position and reverse your ruling in light of all the evidence we have presented. What more evidence is needed to show the applicability of international law in this case than the testimony and closing statement we just heard from Mr. Adams (regarding atrocities he was ordered to carry out in Vietnam—actions he now knows were in violation of International humanitarian law).

As Mr. Carlyle, Mr. Wenk, Ms. Nicholson, and Mr. Elliott all testified, we have tried lobbying, writing letters, and signing petitions to end U.S. warmaking, including the use of private U.S. military contractors and mercenaries, but to no avail. This is especially true right now in Afghanistan. We acted on March 19 because there were no other political or legal alternatives available to us as the executive and legislative branches of government continue to wage war. We acted to prevent an imminent harm from occurring. People are dying now as a direct result of U.S. Drone attacks and other U.S. military actions just as they were dying at the time of our March 19 action. These people aren't merely statistics— they have names and families. We seldom hear in the media who the innocent dead really are! For example, you heard Joan Nicholson testify that on March 1, 2011, U.S. military forces in a helicopter gunship, killed nine boys in Afghanistan as they collected firewood. But do we know their names? Do we know anything about them or their families? Do we, as society, even care? The youngest of the boys killed was named Shahidullah, son of Rahman—he was 7 years old, 7 years old! As the father of a young son, I went to the White House on March 19 to be a voice for Shahidullah.

Judge Canan, who will speak for the victims? What recourse do we, as citizens have, when people, even young children, are being killed indiscriminately, but to engage in nonviolent acts to seek redress such as we did. What recourse do we have when an estimated 2 million Iraqis have died over the last 20 years as direct result of US bombings, US-UN lead sanctions and US invasion. Seared into my soul is one victim of our sanctions-war policy, seven month-old Zahra-Ali, a tiny emaciated baby girl I met who was near death when I visited Iraq in 1998. According to the non-partisan organization, Just Foreign Policy, which draws on figures compiled by the prestigious medical journal The Lancet, the group Iraq Body Count and the British Polling Agency, Opinion Research Business, it is estimated that nearly 1.5 million Iraqis have died due to the US invasion of Iraq which began on March 19, 2003.

With respect to the US war in Afghanistan, according to Wikipedia, tens of thousands of Afghans have died since 2001 from displacement, starvation, disease, exposure, lack of medical treatment and lawlessness resulting from the war.

Finally, we acted in accordance with Divine and moral law which mandates people of faith and conscience to renounce all killing, to beat swords into plowshares and to abolish war.

Simply put, this a really a trial about State-sanctioned murder. We acted on March 19 to stop the US government from murdering people in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya and elsewhere. We acted to save lives. We implore you, Judge Canan, to take this truth to heart.

On March 19, our message on the White House plaza was clear for all to hear: end the wars, bring the war money home now and meet urgent human needs, and free imprisoned military whistle-blower Private Bradley Manning!

Judge Canan, for all these reasons we submit that we had a right to be on the White House sidewalk, that our actions were lawful, and that the police order to leave was not a lawful order, and thus we had no reason to comply with it. Thus, we should never have been arrested! (Regarding these matters we again ask you to consider the District Court of Appeals case of Striet et. al. and how it applies to this one).

In closing we ask: Where are the judges and the legal professionals when it comes to confronting the criminal acts of our government? Will we be here five years from now making the same plea? How many more people have to suffer and die before we end our government's murderous warmaking? This is an historic moment. If justice and peace is to come for the people of Iraq and Afghanistan, it will happen because judges like you spoke out and people from across the political spectrum took nonviolent action to petition our government to make this a reality.

St. Paul writes: "Love is the fulfillment of the law." As you determine the outcome of this case, we appeal to you to act in the name of love, in the name of victims, in the name of truth and justice.

Judge Canan, you have legal ground to stand on in finding us not guilty. The time is now for justice and the law to meet and be clearly applied in this case. We appeal to your conscience to acquit us of all charges. We respectfully invite you, along with Prosecutor's Barnett and Pierce, to join with us to work for the abolition of war and create a nonviolent world. Thank you very much for listening to me."

Postscript: Judge Canan found each of the 19 Defendant's guilty of Failure to Obey a Lawful Order and Disorderly Conduct/Blocking Passage. He sentenced each of them to pay a fine of \$50.00, plus make two contributions to the Victims of Violent Crimes Fund in the amount of \$100.00 each.

