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42 Arrested at U.S. Capitol in Day of Action to Denounce Obama's Broken Promises on Guantanamo, America's Broken Laws, and the Breaking of Lives by Torture

Washington, DC: In a dramatic protest, 42 activists with Witness Against Torture were arrested

this afternoon at the U.S. Capitol. Most of the arrestees had been fasting since January 11th.

The protest, which comes on the eve of the since-voided deadline President Obama had set for closing the prison camp at Guantanamo, was part of nationwide set of actions today that included dozens of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans lobbying Congress; a campaign by human rights organizations - with the support of the rock superband, Coldplay - to flood Twitter with the "CloseGitmo" message; and, a press conference held by retired Generals at the National Press Club.

Those arrested on the Capitol steps held banners reading "Broken Promises, Broken Laws, Broken Lives." Inside the Capitol, 14 activists performed a "memorial service" for the three men whose deaths at Guantanamo in 2006 were initially reported as suicides and callously described as "acts of asymmetrical warfare" by military officials. New reports provide strong evidence that the men may have been tortured to death at a CIA secret prison in Guantanamo.

The ceremony brought the names of the men-- Salah Ahmed Al-Salami, Mani Shaman Al-Utaybi and Yasser Talal Al-Zahrani-- into the Capitol Rotunda, where deceased presidents have lay in state. "We perform this ceremony to recognize the humanity of those whose lives have been broken by our government's policies of torture and indefinite detention," says Jerica Arents of Chicago, Illinois, one of those arrested in the Capitol.

Witness Against Torture has called for an immediate, independent investigation of the deaths, as it has called for the criminal investigation of all those who allegedly designed, executed, and carried out torture policies.

Most of the 42 arrested at the Capitol did not carry identification, taking instead the names of men at Guantanamo through arrest and processing. "Taking the name of Adnan Farhan Abdul Latif is a necessary and real way of bringing his story to Congress," says Joshua Brollier, a co-coordinator with Voices for Creative Nonviolence in Chicago, Illinois. "Adnan was tortured and continues to be held after eight years without charge or trial. It boggles the mind and breaks the heart. It's time for Congress and the Obama administration to make and fulfill a plan for his release." Brollier and others from Voices will continue in Washington through February 2, participating in the Peaceable Assembly Campaign to pressure Obama administration and Congress to explore alternatives to U.S. militarism.

The actions at the Capitol followed a march of "Guantanamo prisoners" dressed in orange jumpsuits and black hoods that began at the White House and stopped at the Supreme Court before going to Capitol grounds, home to the U.S. Congress. "Congress has played a horrible role in refusing to check the power of the president and in supporting torture," commented Matt Daloisio of New York City, a Witness Against Torture organizer. "But it was important to pass by all of the government institutions that have failed to uphold justice and protect the rule of law."

Members of Witness Against Torture began a Fast for Justice on Monday, January 11-- the date in 2002 when the first men were brought to Guantanamo under the Bush administration's "war on terror." One-hundred fifty people from around the country joined the 12 day fast, which will end on Friday, January 22, the promised day for Guantanamo's closure.

"We were so hopeful last year," says Christine Gaunt, a grandmother and third generation farmer from Grinnell, Iowa, who was arrested at the Capitol. "But Obama has broken his promise to close Guantanamo. I am acting today because I am horrified and ashamed that this illegal prison continues to exist, and that those responsible for torture have not been held to account. I am using my body to demand that my government stop the insanity of torture and illegal detention."

Witness Against Torture is a grassroots movement that came into being in December 2005 when 24 activists walked through Cuba to the Guantanamo base to condemn the prison camp and torture policies. Since then, it has engaged in public education, community outreach, and non-violent direct action.