

By Hajira Hematyara

From [The Washington Post](#) | Original Article



*The seal of the Central Intelligence Agency at CIA headquarters in Langley, Va. (Carolyn Kaster/AP)*

*Hajira Hematyara is a teacher in a village near Kabul.*

I believe there are two paths in life — the paths of right and wrong — and that all people know the right path in their hearts. So I believe that people in America, if they can read this, will know

the right thing for their government to do is tell me and my family what happened to my father's body.

My father was Gul Rahman. Sixteen years ago, he was wrongfully imprisoned by the CIA because it suspected he was a militant. He was then tortured and killed in a secret CIA prison in Afghanistan — the only person known to have been killed at a CIA “[black site](#).”

I was 10 years old when he disappeared. He was a good and ordinary man and a wonderful father to me and my three younger sisters. We were living then in a camp in Pakistan for Afghan refugees fleeing the war in our country. We had little, but we were eating and surviving, and my father always had a positive outlook. He was always working to solve not only my family's problems but also the problems of others around us who had even less than we did.

We were poor, but he had a way of making us feel as though we owned a mountain. Even today, I can picture how he looked when he laughed and get back a little bit of that feeling.

But for the past year, the picture of my father in my mind has been crowded out by another image. It is from an [article](#) in the Guardian describing a report from a CIA investigation into my father's death. The report detailed his last hours, as he was freezing to death because he was “shackled . . . on bare concrete while nude from the waist down.” It said at 8 a.m. on Nov. 20, 2002, two hours before he was found dead, a guard saw my father was alive and shivering and that his eyes were “open and blinking.”

That is how I learned the terrible final details of what happened to my father between the time he left home one morning on a trip to see a doctor in Islamabad and the time his eyes closed forever. For 15 years, my family had been asking for information from the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan, pleading to know whether he was alive or dead. In 2010, we heard from American journalists that my father had supposedly been tortured to death in a secret prison in Afghanistan, but no official ever confirmed this was true.

My sisters and I came of age during those years. To those around us, my father was dead. My mother was a widow, and we were her fatherless children, which left us in the margins of our society. But we did not know for sure, and he never had a funeral. My grandmother believed until the day she died that her son was alive and would be coming home.

For me, the hardest thing about those years was discovering how much I had lost. The more people I met, the more I understood my father's goodness was an example of the best in Afghan society. Seeing that — and knowing how much that humanity is needed for the future of my country — made it harder for me to accept the rumors that he had been killed. Like my grandmother, I kept alive a small hope that he would come home.

Any hope I held on to finally ran out in 2014, when the U.S. Senate wrote a [report](#) about secret American prisons torturing men, and how that abuse killed my father.

My family and two of the men who survived this torture sued in federal court to try to get some justice. It was during this lawsuit against the psychologists behind the CIA's torture program that the government released the report that described my father's last hours. As part of the [settlement](#), my family received a statement that said, "Gul Rahman was subjected to abuses in the CIA program that resulted in his death and pain and suffering to his family."

The truth hurts, but it also helps. We were finally able to gather for a memorial to my father.

But that is not the same as a proper funeral, which is considered essential in our culture. We believe people who are not buried and mourned correctly cannot rest in peace. This may be why I am so haunted by the image of my father's eyes in that report, still open and still blinking.

Six months ago, my family filed a request with the U.S. government to give us information about what happened to my father's body. The government did not answer. Now our lawyers have [filed a lawsuit](#) to get that information. I am hoping the American people will join us in asking their government to do what is right, so we can do the right thing for my father.