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Sufyian Barhoumi Finally Returned to Algeria After Being Cleared for Transfer in 2016

The U.S. government made public today that Sufyian Barhoumi was sent home to Algeria, nearly twenty years after arriving at Guantánamo and six years after being cleared for transfer. Unexplained bureaucratic problems during the Obama administration delayed his release, and he was left stranded in the prison during the Trump administration, which all but stopped transfers.

In 2008, the U.S. government briefly charged Mr. Barhoumi in a military commission, but it soon dropped all charges without explanation. Even when, in 2012, he offered to plead guilty to any crime the government wanted to charge him with, so long as he could receive a fixed date for release home to his elderly mother, prosecutors – having ceased to believe he was guilty of anything – refused to do so. Yet he spent four years awaiting formal clearance and then another six waiting for transfer back home to his aging mother.

“Our government owes Sufyian and his mother years of their lives back,” said [Shayana Kadidal](#), Senior Managing Attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights. “I’m overjoyed that he will be home with his family, but I will dearly miss his constant good humor and empathy for the suffering of others in the utterly depressing environment of Guantánamo.”

Algeria has received at least 15 men from Guantánamo, and Mr. Barhoumi’s return home seemed imminent after he was cleared for transfer in 2016, his lawyers say. The government stated in a court filing that its failure to transfer him was due to factors “not related to petitioner himself.” Mr. Barhoumi sought and was denied an emergency motion for a court order to permit his transfer before President Obama’s term expired. At the time, he told his lawyer, “it’s not you who decides when I leave this place, and it’s not politicians. It’s God. He decides when I will leave.”

He remained at Guantánamo under the Trump administration as it transferred only one man in four years.

Mr. Barhoumi, who became a fluent English-speaker, was well-liked at Guantánamo by both guards and other imprisoned men. His father, a lawyer imprisoned by the French during the Algerian independence movement, died while Sufyan was in prison. Mr. Barhoumi is pleased he has arrived home in time to attend his younger brother's wedding later this year, and plans to take that brother's place as caretaker for his mother. Last week, he told his attorneys that the deputy camp commander called him in and told him he was going home, "And at that moment, I saw my mother in the room in front of me, and I couldn't stop crying."

A multi-lingual fan of pop culture whose favorite movie is the cheerleader battle film *Bring It On*, he often stated that he had "no black heart against America" despite his years of detention. His final words to his attorneys on Thursday were "Hasta la vista!"

The Biden administration has now transferred three men from Guantánamo. From a total of 780 men, 37 remain; 25 are not charged, and 18 have been cleared for transfer. The Center for Constitutional Rights, which was the first organization to file a case on behalf of men imprisoned at Guantánamo, still has three clients there: [Sharqawi Al Hajj](#), [Guled Hassan Duran Khan](#), and [Majid](#).

For more information, visit the Center for Constitutional Rights [case page](#) and Mr. Barhoumi's [profile](#).

His family was [interviewed](#)

by the New York Times in October 2020.