

From Center for Constitutional Rights

New York – Today, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) issued the following statement in response to the announcement by the U.S. government that it forcibly repatriated a Guantánamo detainee to Algeria:

“We condemn the forcible repatriation of Abdul Aziz Naji to Algeria. Although Mr. Naji has long been cleared of any connection with terrorism, we are deeply concerned that he will disappear into secret detention and face the threat of persecution by terrorist groups in Algeria. He bears no ill will toward the Algerian government, but fears that it will be unable to protect him from extremists in Algeria.

“Mr. Naji fled various forms of persecution in Algeria many years ago, including having been attacked by an extremist. His attempt to avoid forced repatriation and remain at Guantánamo Bay, after nearly a decade of detention without charge or trial, rather than return to Algeria underscores the depth of his fears. Regrettably, our government repatriated him against his will and despite credible fears of future persecution, in violation of the U.N. Convention Against Torture and other international law.

“CCR supports the ongoing efforts of the U.S. State Department to close Guantánamo Bay, particularly in the face of unyielding resistance from Congress and the seemingly detached indifference of the White House to the continuing plight of the men held in our notorious prison. However, the solution to Guantánamo Bay does not rest on forcing detainees to return to countries where they fear torture and persecution. It is not only illegal, but also bad policy. It is another unnecessary stain on our country’s human rights record, and certain to upset our friends and allies around the world. Forced repatriations make the United States appear complicit with repressive regimes and are certain to outrage Arabs and Muslims around the world at a time when our government needs their support.

“Attorneys for Mr. Naji have fought tirelessly for their client over the course of many years. Unfortunately, their efforts to prevent the forced repatriation of their client ended late Friday night with the Supreme Court’s denial of an application to stay his transfer. We admire their selfless dedication, and our thoughts are with their client in Algeria.”

CCR has led the legal battle over Guantanamo for the last eight years – sending the first ever habeas attorney to the base and sending the first attorney to meet with an individual transferred from CIA “ghost detention” to Guantanamo. CCR has been responsible for organizing and coordinating more than 500 pro bono lawyers across the country to represent the men at Guantanamo, ensuring that nearly all have the option of legal representation. In addition, CCR has been working to resettle the approximately 30 men who remain at Guantánamo because they cannot return to their country of origin for fear of persecution and torture.

The Center for Constitutional Rights is dedicated to advancing and protecting the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Founded in 1966 by attorneys who represented civil rights movements in the South, CCR is a non-profit legal and educational organization committed to the creative use of law as a positive force for social change.