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The U.S. military has acknowledged for the first time the number of prisoners on hunger strike at the military prison has topped 100. About a fifth of the hunger strikers are now being force-fed. Lawyers for the prisoners say more than 130 men are taking part in the hunger strike, which began in February. One of the hunger strikers is a Yemeni man named Samir Naji al Hasan Moqbel. In a letter published in *The New York Times*, he wrote: "Denying ourselves food and risking death every day is the choice we have made. I just hope that because of the pain we are suffering, the eyes of the world will once again look to Guantánamo before it is too late." We speak to attorney Carlos Warner, who represents 11 prisoners at Guantánamo. He spoke to one of them on Friday. "Unfortunately, they're held because the president has no political will to end Guantánamo," Warner says. "The president has the authority to transfer individuals if he believes that it's in the interests of the United States. But he doesn't have the political will to do so because 166 men in Guantánamo don't have much pull in the United States. But the average American on the street does not understand that half of these men, 86 of the men, are cleared for release."

AMY GOODMAN: We begin today's show with the deepening crisis at Guantánamo, where the U.S. military has acknowledged for the first time the number of prisoners on hunger strike at the military prison has topped a hundred. About a fifth of the hunger strikers are now being force-fed. Lawyers for the prisoners say more than 130 men are taking part in the hunger strike, which began in February.

One of the hunger strikers is a Yemeni man named Samir Naji al Hasan Moqbel. In a [letter](#) published in *The New York Times* he wrote, quote, "The situation is desperate now. All of the detainees here are suffering deeply. ...

"And there is no end in sight to our imprisonment. Denying ourselves food and risking death every day is the choice we have made.

"I just hope that because of the pain we are suffering, the eyes of the world will once again look to Guantánamo before it is too late."

Those, the words of Samir Naji al Hasan Moqbel. He has been held at Guantánamo for 11 years without charge.

A Muslim adviser who works for the Pentagon is predicting some prisoners will die before the hunger strike ends. The adviser, who goes by the name Zak, said, quote, "They are not done yet, and they will not be done until there is more than one death."

Some prisoners have reportedly lost dramatic amounts of weight, while authorities have attempted to break the strike with force-feeding and isolation. Many human rights and medical groups consider force-feeding a form of torture. The U.S. government says allowing them to starve would be inhumane.

To talk more about the situation at Guantánamo, we're joined by Carlos Warner, an attorney with the Office of the Federal Defender in Northeastern Ohio. He represents 11 Guantánamo prisoners.

Welcome to *Democracy Now!*, Carlos Warner. Tell us about the prisoners you represent who are on hunger strike right now.

CARLOS WARNER: Thank you, Amy, for having me. We represent, as you said, 11 men there, and we believe the vast majority, if not all of them, are hunger striking, with exception of the high-value detainee that we represent. We also believe that the majority of them are also being force-fed. The military says—I believe that you said 24 is the latest number, but we believe the military rotates people on and off that force-feeding list. But I think debating about the numbers at this point is irrelevant. We know that this is the largest event that Guantánamo has ever experienced in terms of scope and duration. We're in crisis, and President Obama is doing nothing.

AMY GOODMAN: What triggered this hunger strike, Carlos?

CARLOS WARNER: There are about four years of détente between the guards and the men, where the—really, the guards were understanding of the men and the men were very respectful for the guards. And the guard force was changed in September. It went from the Army—or, excuse me, from the Navy to the Army. And it was just—from that time, we started to have crisis. And you started to see that in the 9/11 trials with these stories about the men's documents being taken away. Basically, the Army made a decision: We want to take everything out of the camps and know what we're dealing with. This all came to a head on February the 6th when the men's cells were stripped and Muslim linguists were leafing through the Qur'ans with the Army looking on. And this was, as I've said, the spark that ignited this current strike. And from there, we've just devolved and devolved.

The military is doing all the wrong things. I don't blame the military. They have been an inenviable task: They're in Guantánamo. But they're doing all the wrong things in terms of ending the strike. They could end the strike, but more importantly, the president could end the strike if he took some time out of his busy schedule. He's preparing for the correspondents' dinner, and that drives us crazy because we see our clients dying. And in five, 10 minutes, he could at least make incredible progress on ending the hunger strike. And he has no will to do so.

AMY GOODMAN: Carlos Warner, you spoke to one of your clients at Guantánamo on Friday. Who did you speak to, and what did he say?

CARLOS WARNER: Fayiz al-Kandry, he—I've been—this is the third conversation I've had with him since the strike began. I visited him in person twice, and then on Friday I got a phone call. And things have gone downhill. He started to be force-fed, according to him, last Monday. And I got a notice about this last Wednesday from the government that he's being force-fed. And he told me that they're force-feeding him with what's called a size 10 tube, a bigger tube than is required. He said that this makes it difficult for him to breathe, and it induces vomiting. And he has asked them to give them—give him a smaller tube, and the military refuses to do so. Why they would not do these things, we have no idea.

But he underscored to me, because they—the military has clamped down, made it harder for the information to come out, since this began. But he wanted me to emphasize that this is a peaceful protest, that any detainee that's striking out in anger is wrong, that this is a peaceful hunger strike to protest, first of all, the military's tactics, but most importantly also the indefinite detention. And he wanted to make that clear, that this is not a violent protest, that he wants the hunger strike to end. But so long as it goes on, he intends for it to be peaceful.

AMY GOODMAN: Carlos Warner—

CARLOS WARNER: He was in very bad shape. I'm sorry.

AMY GOODMAN: I understand you have a letter from Fayiz Mohammad al-Kandry? Could you read it to us?

CARLOS WARNER: I do. And he—what he did was, for his military lawyer, he made a lantern for him, and I saw that when I visited him in March. And he wrote this letter about the lantern. It's dated 3/21/13.

"Dear Mr. Warner:

"I made this lantern with my brothers. It's made with bits of paper and cardboard. We used a water bottle sanded on the floor as glass. We painted it with bits of paint and fruit juice. It's held together by pressure only.

"We made this lantern for those in the world who remember and pray for us during this time of suffering. Let its light fill you.

"Use it to bring peace to your heart.

"Thank you,
[signed] Fayiz [Mohammad] al-Kandry."

And when he wrote that, I mean, I felt that that was a goodbye letter. And it's tragic.

AMY GOODMAN: I want to turn to former Guantánamo prisoner [Sami al-Hajj](#), the only journalist held at the base, held there for more than six years without charge. In January 2007, he also began a hunger strike that lasted 438 days until his release in May of 2008. I spoke to him in Doha, Qatar, in December, where he works for Al Jazeera and where we had gone for the climate change summit. He talked about being violently force-fed during the hunger strike.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: They doesn't bring a small tube, big.

AMY GOODMAN: They bring a tube that's too big—

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, yes, too big, very big.

AMY GOODMAN: —to put up your nose and down into your stomach?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: And there is some [inaudible]. When they take it, they take it by force, and very quick.

AMY GOODMAN: So they jerk it out of your nose.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, some blood coming, yes. And many times they doesn't cleaning the tube. When they feed the other guy, they come, and same thing. They give it to you by—

AMY GOODMAN: They use the tube that they used in the person they have seated next to you.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: For another, yes, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: And then they put it into you—

SAMI AL-HAJJ: For you, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: —without cleaning it.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Without cleaning. You see the blood and everything inside.

AMY GOODMAN: You see the blood.

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Inside, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: Did you say—when they would take the tube of a man next to you and put it into you, shove it down through your nose into your stomach, would you say something?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: For that, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: Would you ask why they were doing this?

SAMI AL-HAJJ: Yes, they said—they told us, "We want you to break your hunger strike." They tell us directly like that. They ask us to break our hunger strike. They said, "We'll never deal with you as the detainees until you break your hunger strike."

AMY GOODMAN: That's former Guantánamo prisoner Sami al-Hajj. I visited him at Al Jazeera, where he is a journalist in charge of the human rights division, this past December. On Thursday, the American Medical Association sent a letter to U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel condemning force-feeding, saying every competent patient has the right to refuse medical intervention, including life-sustaining interventions. As we wrap up, Carlos Warner, can you explain why these men continue to be held at Guantánamo? Hundred sixty-six men, the majority of them have been cleared for release.

CARLOS WARNER: Unfortunately, they're held because the president has no political will to end Guantánamo. And it falls on the left. And I'm part of the left. I'm a federal public defender. My wife campaigned for President Obama. But the bottom line is that the left isn't pushing for the release. He, the president, is blaming this on the right and saying the right has made these restrictions. Well, what the left doesn't understand, and the right has pointed this out, is that the president has the authority to transfer individuals if he believes that it's in the interests of the United States. But he doesn't have the political will to do so because 166 men in Guantánamo don't have much pull in the United States. So—but the average American on the street does not understand that half of these men, 87 of these men—86 of them, excuse me—86 of the men are cleared for release, meaning that the government has said that not only haven't they done anything wrong, but they're not dangerous, that they could be released immediately. And they languish there in Guantánamo while the president is guffawing with, you know, the social elite in Washington.

We're just asking the president to appoint somebody to start working on the problem. If the

president does that, we can make incredible progress in a year. I've been in this situation for many years now, and I know where these men can go. And frankly, the executive knows, as well. The State Department knows where these men can be placed. And they were working on those solutions, but the president doesn't want to implement what the State Department has done.

AMY GOODMAN: Where can they be placed?

CARLOS WARNER: Well, there are rehabilitation centers in both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, built under the eye of the United States, where—that they could go, the 86 men could go in an instant, if the president had political will to transfer them. And not every man can go there, but we could certainly start working on many of these innocent men. And if you are not on that list of 86, the president has no process for you to—for you to challenge your detention. So, many of the individuals that he has held indefinitely and say should be held indefinitely, they haven't done anything wrong, either. But basically the president has said these are people that, if we release them, we're afraid they'll—they might harm us because they're ticked off we've held them for 11 years without charge.

But that's not what we—who we are as a country. As a country, we don't hold people for what they may do in the future. So give those men process. Give them an ability to be released. Now, the left has to mobilize. Senator Feinstein came out and said, "Let's get rid of the innocent men. Let's get them out of Guantánamo." But the rest of the left has to do that. It starts there. And as much as I would like to cast blame on the right, can't do it here. We have to cast blame on the president. He needs to pick up this ball and run for it—run with it, or people are going to die, Amy.

AMY GOODMAN: Carlos Warner, I want to thank you for being with us, attorney with the Office of the Federal Defender in northeastern Ohio representing 11 Guantánamo prisoners, speaking to us from Cleveland, Ohio. This is *Democracy Now!* More on the prisoners after break.