

By Debra Sweet

Saturday was the first time it felt like spring in NYC, and crowds of people filled Union Square Park watching jugglers and musicians, and just hanging out. It was so heartbreakingly pleasant, one felt bad bearing the news to tourists that out of many things wrong in this class-divided world, we were about to challenge them to take notice of one very important thing.



*Union Square Park, New York City March 30, 2013, marking 51 days of hunger strike by Guantanamo prisoners.* Photo: [Witness Against Torture](#)

Ten of us put on orange jumpsuits to mark the 51st day of the potentially deadly hunger strike by men imprisoned by the U.S. at Guantanamo. Witness Against Torture activists have been fasting for a week in solidarity; this was a public way and place to end the fast, and have visual impact. Often I am doing public relations at events like this. Today I wanted to experience the time under the hood, and be able to listen for peoples' comments.

90% of those seeing us walked on by. Hundreds took flyers. Many took photos, though oddly, most didn't really stop to find out much. Several said "thank you" to those of us in jumpsuits. Comments ran from "they should burn that place down with everyone in it," to "they should free all those guys, and then burn it down!" A few people ranted that "they" were all terrorists. One said, "the prisoners are lucky; they could of all just been shot." Some people were just confused, saying Obama had closed down the prison. Memorably, one hipster told another, "I

think they're monks, protesting Easter.”

One of the people flyering commented that all the Black people who stopped for a flyer “got it,” recognized what the problem is, and expressed compassion. A people who has suffered oppression is maybe most able to empathize, notwithstanding that the current President and Attorney General are responsible for no prisoners leaving Guantanamo in the last 18 months alive.

At this point, so far into the fast, we hear men are suffering terribly, possibly being deprived of water they see as safe to drink, some force-fed and some hospitalized. Clive Stafford-Smith, attorney for Shaker Amer, tweeted “90mins on phone with Shaker Aamer today; 130 detainees on hunger strike; situation in [# Gitmo](#) as dire as General ‘Miller Time’” referencing Geoffrey Miller, who ran Guantanamo in 2004, and then went to Abu Ghraib, running torture at both.

How do we close Guantanamo and save the lives of the prisoners? Without the men taking this action, the White House would not have been finally forced to acknowledge the hunger strike, and major media would not be now covering Guantanamo. Their action is decisive, and desperate, as their attorneys report. There is no way out of Guantanamo now, absent a mass demand that it be finally closed and the prisoners charged and tried, or released, as most of them have been already cleared for.

But our action is decisive also. Find out [what you can do where you are.](#)

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