

By Marie - Marie is a French student in a political sciences school currently interning for the summer at World Can't Wait's National Office in New York.

The purpose of this article is not to find an answer for each question I had or wondered. Neither is it to explain all the issues of Guantánamo, but rather to show what people really think and to speak up for what I believe is fair and that which represents my values.

A week ago, the director of World Can't Wait, Debra Sweet, and I talked about my trip to Washington, DC for the Witness Against Torture protest demanding, "Close Guantánamo." We decided I would be free to write anything I wanted.

I then reflected it would be interesting to interview activists and people involved in organizations against torture, crimes and Guantánamo Bay, as well as American citizens and foreign tourists to collect a maximum of varied opinions.

Before writing this article, I thought I would be as neutral as possible and play the "journalist" card as my school has taught me.

But how can I remain neutral when talking about torture, discrimination, crimes and injustice? How does one stay objective when a so-called democratic country fails to respect the most fundamental human rights, the most important international conventions and its own constitution? How can I accept a country that is able to perpetrate such abominations without condemnation or punishment?

Over the next two days, I spoke with more than sixty people about Guantánamo, a prison that sparks off controversial questions and remains a painful testament to some of the most obscene crimes of the US government.

"I DON'T CARE ABOUT GUANTÁNAMO AT ALL"

This was the first comment I heard when I asked a woman, who was watching the protest in front of the White House, about her thoughts. "*I have no opinion,*" she added.

How many people in the US and the world do not have any opinion about Guantánamo? Is it

because they see no personal connection to themselves that they do not feel concerned about these issues? Do they really have no opinion or do they prefer to not make a choice? I am not judging, but attempting to understand how citizens cannot hold any position or view in this situation. Having an opinion means taking a stand on an issue and shouldering all the implied responsibilities. Concerning Guantánamo, the implications at both the national and international levels are way more important than usual.

During the protest, someone shouted “*Shut up! Guantánamo should stay open!*” When I asked him why he was saying that he didn’t answer with anything, except to say: “Go to hell!” Supporting the Guantánamo machine supposedly makes you “pro-US” and a “patriot,” but it also makes you a part of the system, a system which perpetuates and even idolizes the pro-torture and anti-human rights attitude. Someone else advanced that “*it is certainly easier to speak when you do not have to make decisions and handle all the consequences.*”

” Being against the policies there forces you to not remain passive. Denouncing US actions and foreign policies makes people think you could be “anti-US” or even a “pro-Taliban” person.

Thus, having no opinion is the most effortless solution: no question to answer, no viewpoint to explain, no critics to face.

“HOW CAN GUANTÁNAMO EXIST?”

Many people asked me this question. I, along with many others, believe in our laws. We want to know that the truth will always be superior to the lie. We want to be sure that we can trust in our justice system. We need to be certain that our rights will be protected and defended. We as Americans, We as Arabs, We as Human.

Guantánamo makes us have doubts about our convictions. “*Everybody should have the right to have a trial and answer for his/her crimes*”

” (an Italian tourist). “

Torture has always been denounced by the US. Why does it seem ‘legal’ there?

” (an American from Indiana). “

When I think about what prisoners have had to endure, I feel terrible, because what has been going on there is horrible

” (a Colombian mother).

Guantánamo is also raising a lot of questions about politics or Bush vs. Obama’s government. “*I think we had a lot of expectations for Obama, that he would change what Bush did. I do not know what to think now*”

” (a German tourist). “

He had promised to close Guantánamo. That should have been one of his first actions after his election. We are still waiting

” (an American from Texas). “

We need to be patient. It is not easy to clean all Bush’s crap

” (an American student from Washington DC). “

I cannot believe that Obama is for torture, but he may agree with the idea of Guantánamo as a prison for terrorists

” (an American student from Atlanta).

“GUANTÁNAMO IS THE MOST VISIBLE THING OF WHAT THE US IS ABLE TO DO.”

Even if the government is trying to cover up its affairs, we all can see how it is functioning illegally.

But is it only a question of legality? My opinion is no. Torture is one of the most horrible things in the world. It makes us confront the worst that humanity is able to do. Torture is not only illegal.

It is immoral and not acceptable. There is NO justification for torturing people.

This is obscene, especially because the US has pretended to fight for human rights and against torture for decades. They are still pretending to defend people’s rights, democracy and freedom. In the past, it has taken less to prompt international condemnations. People in Guantánamo have no rights. That is deeply against the Constitution and the laws, which we pride ourselves on, but no charges are pressed against the US.

“We thought we should give Obama a chance. He is a brilliant guy but he did not come through” (several activists at Witness Against Torture). Guantánamo, torture and crimes are not only Bush issues. As World Can’t Wait says: “

Crimes are crimes, no matter who does them

”. Everybody should keep this in mind instead of trying to find some excuses to explain what is inexplicable.

There is no excuse that can explain what the US government has done and continues to do. Crimes under Obama are as much as crimes under Bush and must be resisted by anyone who claims a shred of conscience. **“Justice delayed is justice denied”** (William Gladstone, a British politician in the 19th century). The Obama administration has refused to prosecute any members of the Bush regime who are responsible for war crimes, including some who admitted to waterboarding and other forms of torture, thereby making their actions acceptable for him or any future president.

“STRUGGLING FOR JUSTICE, DEMOCRACY AND HUMANITY”

When states respond to the threat of terrorism by abusing human rights, they are not solving the

problem but fueling it. We should consider the world in its entirety. This means starting by affording the prisoners at Guantánamo the same rights that we would demand for our own citizenry held in foreign prisons. Our rights and safety are imperiled when the rights of anyone are violated. **We are all affected** when our justice is flouted.

As Ms. H. Candace Gorman, an attorney representing Guantánamo detainees, wrote in an article, “*the government claims that there are big, bad secrets in many of the documents [...] that it is imperative that those documents are kept out of the public eye. It is true that many bad secrets are in these documents, but the secrets that I have seen are what our government and military has done to these men:* ***This is not about national security. This is about national embarrassment.***

” We need to speak up, we need to have more press coverage, we need to re-establish the truth, and we need to educate young people. This is our du
ty

as witnesses, as citizens, as human rights believers.

Silence means consent

Changes will not come from our politicians

. We have the power to make these changes, in many different ways: going to the street, supporting financially this cause, getting involved in organizations fighting for what you believe. Closing Guantánamo is not a final aim, but an important step for a bigger struggle. As many activists in Witness Against Torture told me, “*the fight will continue until everything is finished.*” We have a chance, the one to make this moment an example, to show the world that criminals, no matter who and how powerful they are, have to

be prosecuted and condemned for their crimes

. If we let the US government get away with this, how can we expect anything better in the future? Our legitimacy, our democracy and our future are at stake.

I realized that working for these issues was more difficult than I expected. We are dealing with tough topics but above all we are confronting all the time our ideals with reality. How do we not give up when we understand that all our beliefs seem to be fake principles? How can we continue to trust our representatives, our laws, and have faith in humanity when all we have been thinking looks like a big lie?

As frustrating, alarming, and frightening as this reality is, **I will stick to my principles and I will not stop speaking out** like many

other people who continue to advocate for making our world better each day.

Peter Gabriel sang
“*Don't give up now, we're proud of who you are.
Don't give up, you know it's never been easy.
Don't give up, 'cause I believe there's a place,
There's a place where we belong*”
... **We will not give up.**