

Guantanamo Bay

Every man, every woman and every child stands as an equal. Every voice and every expression is valid, and carries the truth of perspective. Every human being has a responsibility to the whole, which earns them rights as an individual. People have fought and died for these values; first to create them, then to achieve them, and then to uphold them. Australia is privileged to carry these principles as the very fibre of our society. As a culture we believe that everyone is entitled to treatment which befits their status as a person. When one is treated unfairly, the entire ideal is threatened. If Australia has reached the idealistic state of true equality, I would ask why our politicians still support the disgrace which is Guantanamo Bay.

Like many Australians, I believe that terrorism is one of the purist forms of evil.. I also believe that the hatred which fuels this hopeless “war” is not unfounded. It is easy enough to understand how growing up in poverty, and seeing wealthy countries gaining more wealth through your own country’s resources would create a deep-seated resentment. This in no way excuses or properly explains the violence, but by seeking to understand the motives, by admitting that these are not just random acts of malice, we are forced to admit in turn that terrorists are people. And as people they are entitled to basic rights.

America claims that prisoners held in Guantanamo Bay are the worst of the worst. Apparently these men are highly dangerous, and therefore of course they should be treated like animals. Australia believes that is perfectly acceptable to hold our citizen without trial for 4 years. John Howard insists that David Hicks- an Australian- must face an American style of justice, which involves assumed guilt, and any interrogation techniques necessary to further their own Holy War. Our politicians fail to see that by compromising their principles, they risk something far more important.

Our democracy is built on a foundation of fairness, equality and transparency. Our justice system operates around the belief that everyone is “innocent until proven guilty”. As a society we believe that everyone is entitled to humane treatment and basic living standards. Guantanamo Bay contradicts all these values. Everything our society was built upon has been sacrificed for this cesspool of a prison.

It is widely accepted that the conditions at Guantanamo Bay are inhumane and unbearable. The detention of nine men has been ruled by a fair court to be completely unlawful, and there are serious doubts about the justification of the other imprisonments. Many detainees are placed in isolated for prolonged periods of time, intentionally denied social interaction and confined without stimulus. Often they are forced to endure sleep deprivation. This can only be seen as a deliberate attempt to inflict physiological damage. Prisoners have reported verbal abuse from guards and nurses, and there have been allegations of physical torture, including beatings and electric shocks. Some prisoners have been denied one of the most basic rights of all- hygiene. Karama Khamisan- a detainee- claims that as a punishment for defending himself he was held in a solitary cell for 25 days. He was naked the entire time, and was only taken once to use the toilet and shower. He avoided solid food to prevent himself from defecating in the cell.

The abuse starts on the day prisoners arrive, and continues as indefinitely as their detention. A former detainee has reported that during his transfer to Guantanamo, his hands were cuffed so tightly that when they were removed some of his skin was torn off.

In these conditions it is little wonder that many attempt suicide or self harm, including many hunger strikes which end in painful force-feeding. Jumah al-Dossari is one of the most extreme cases. He was detained in 2001 and since then claims that he was forced to endure beatings, rape, extreme cold, death threats and other assaults, including being smeared with menstrual blood during an interrogation. During his imprisonment, he tried to commit suicide at least nine times, and participated in a prolonged hunger strike. He cut himself, ripped open the stitches from old wounds, and tried to hang himself during a meeting with his lawyer. Against the advice of medical experts, Officials continued to hold him the most extreme section of Guantanamo. One day before a scheduled court case challenging the conditions of his detention, Jumah al-Dossari was moved to a different section of Guantanamo, where he was able to interact with other prisoners.

This is just one case among hundreds. Real men- with real lives and a real ability to suffer- are being held without trial and without charge. They are denied access to legal representation and contact with family. They are kept in conditions which are nothing short of disgusting, and given no cause for hope that anything will change. Australia supports this, and has done nothing to save its own citizen. These violations are in themselves

wrong at the deepest level, but they are also doing irrevocable damage to our society.

Terrorism seeks to destroy our lives. The people who are involved want our values and our leaders to break apart, leaving us open to more pain and fear. By supporting a situation which intentionally violates human rights, Australia is giving terrorism the greatest victory of all. If Guantanamo Bay is an indication of what is to come in this harsh new world of security, sedition and neo-fascism, then I fear that the terrorists have already won. Throughout history, ordinary people have defended their rights and the rights of those around them. They have fought and died to gain what we have, and what is being eroded today. If we stand idly by while human beings are treated like this, then everything they fought for is lost. I would urge every free-thinking citizen of Australia to defend the men at Guantanamo Bay, if not for them, then for what they represent.