

PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

April 8, 2013

The Honorable Charles Hagel
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon, Room 3E880
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to express the deep concerns of Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) regarding the hunger strike of the detainees at the detention center at Guantánamo Bay. While accounts differ as to the exact numbers, all sources agree that dozens of prisoners are currently refusing food. Reports from habeas attorneys suggest that many of these individuals have lost considerable weight and that some are reaching the stage where their health may be permanently impaired.

As psychologists and other mental health professionals and behavioral scientists, we are well aware of the deleterious effects of hopelessness and powerlessness on physical and mental health and wellbeing. These conditions result in elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and other emotional disturbances, as well as increased susceptibility to disease, heart attacks, and other serious medical conditions.

The situation that has sparked the hunger strike at Guantánamo induces both hopelessness and powerlessness. All of the detainees have been imprisoned for years, many having been there for over 10 years, with no indication of how long they will remain imprisoned or if they will ever be released. The vast majority has never been charged with a crime. Most have been cleared for release for several years, but they remain imprisoned in harsh circumstances due to a lack of political will among U.S. political leaders. These detainees have been deprived of any realistic path to remedy their grievances or to restore their sense of autonomy and self-efficacy. Decades of psychological research and clinical practice demonstrate that such possibilities are necessary for psychological wellbeing.

Mr. Secretary, we request that you do all in your power to resolve the hunger strike in a manner that respects the concerns and autonomy of the detainees. We further request that you act with all due urgency to resolve the fundamentally inhumane and un-American use of prolonged imprisonment without trial that lies at the heart of the Guantánamo project. Since the opening of Guantánamo, the United States has been viewed by many around the world as a superpower that employs the abuse of prisoners as an instrument of state policy, thus setting back decades of progress on human rights. We hope that, as the new Secretary of Defense, you will reverse this disastrous course.

We further urge you – for as long as the Guantánamo detention center remains open – to allow the detainees to receive medical evaluations and care from health professionals who

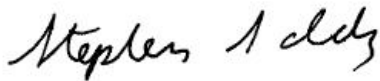
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are independent of the military command and responsive solely to the needs and wishes of the detainees. While many military health professionals are honorably carrying out their professional responsibility to put their patients' needs first, the pressures on them in a restricted and secret military setting necessarily interfere with their ability to do so. Further, numerous reports suggest the detainees hold a deep distrust of those assigned to treat them, which interferes with their receiving appropriate care. Only independent health professionals, outside the military, can remedy this situation. At the same time, allowing access to independent health professionals would begin to address the powerlessness that causes so much harm and would help to improve the standing of the U.S. in the international community.

Mr. Secretary, the situation at Guantánamo is approaching a tipping point. Please work to ensure that the situation turns in a positive direction for all concerned, so that it does not become an ever-greater disaster for both the detainees and the reputation of the United States.

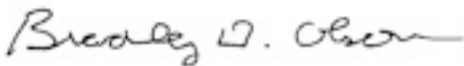
Thank you for your attention. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Stephen Soldz, Ph.D.

Co-Chair, Psychologists for Social Responsibility Human Rights Program



Bradley O. Olson, Ph.D.

President, Psychologists for Social Responsibility

For the Psychologists for Social Responsibility Steering Committee

cc: President Barack H. Obama