

Guantanamo Bay Detention Center

FACT SHEET



Sixteen years after it opened, the detention center at Guantanamo Bay remains a symbol of our nation's use of torture, and a place where even now, over a decade after they were first captured; most of the remaining prisoners have never been charged or tried for any crime. The prison at Guantanamo Bay costs more than \$10 million per prisoner per year to operate, and is both immoral and counterproductive to our national interests. Former President Bush and former President Obama both agreed that the prison at Guantanamo should be closed. Today, though, it remains open, and the prisoners there are increasingly losing hope of ever leaving.

In 2013, desperate and feeling a growing sense of hopelessness, detainees began a prolonged hunger strike to protest their continued detention without charge or trial. Over the course of the hunger strike, over forty detainees were force-fed. Although the Pentagon no longer makes public the number of hunger strikers, to this day some Guantanamo detainees continue to refuse food.

History of the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center

The detention center at Guantanamo Bay opened on January 11th, 2002, to hold the detainees from the post-9/11 "War on Terror." The Bush Administration argued that federal courts had no jurisdiction over foreigners captured abroad and held in Cuba. By labeling them "unlawful combatants" rather than prisoners of war, they sought to deny the basic rights guaranteed POWs by the Geneva Conventions. The Supreme Court repeatedly found that key pieces of the Bush Administration's detention policy were in violation of the U.S. Constitution.

Because many detainees were tortured at Guantanamo and almost all of the people held there were imprisoned without trial, Guantanamo quickly became an internationally recognized symbol of torture and abuse. As a result, not only did the treatment of people held at Guantanamo violate basic morality, Guantanamo was also a recruiting tool for terrorist organizations. By 2008, Guantanamo had become such a practical problem for the U.S. that by the end of his presidency, President Bush publicly called for it to be closed.

GUANTANAMO BY THE NUMBERS **(As of December 2017)**

- 780** – Total number of detainees who have been held at the Guantanamo Bay facility.
- 700** – Of the 780 detainees, over 700 have been released, most without having ever been charged, many after being detained for years.
- 26** – Minimum number of prisoners who were tortured in CIA-run facilities before being transferred to Guantanamo.
- 21** – Number of children who have been imprisoned at Guantanamo.
- 9** – Number of Guantanamo detainees who died while in custody, 7 by suspected suicide.
- \$10 million** – Cost to house one detainee for a year in Guantanamo.
- 5** – Number of prisoners who continue to be held in Guantanamo despite having been cleared for release by our government.

LEARN. PRAY. ACT.

-  www.nrcat.org
-  www.facebook.com/nrcat
-  [@nrcattweets](https://twitter.com/nrcattweets)
-  [@nrcatphotos](https://www.instagram.com/nrcatphotos)
-  www.pinterest.com/nrcat/

 National Religious Campaign
Against Torture

On January 22nd, 2009, two days after he took office, President Obama announced that he would close the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center. He issued an executive order mandating that executive branch agencies act to close Guantanamo within one year, saying it was time to “restore the standards of due process and the core constitutional values that have made this country great, even in the midst of war, even in dealing with terrorism.” Unfortunately, President Obama did not act quickly to follow through on his executive order, and his political opponents took the opportunity to politicize the issue. Within less than a year, Congress passed legislation (legislation that President Obama signed because it was packaged with other programs that he supported) that placed unreasonable restrictions on transferring any detainees out of Guantanamo (even those detainees our own government said it had no reason to continue holding).

Current Situation

By the end of his presidency, President Obama had reduced the prisoner population in Guantanamo to 41 people. 10 of these were in some stage of the military commissions process, 5 of them were cleared for release, and 26 were neither charged nor cleared for release – in other words they have been detained for a decade or more without ever being charged with a crime, or having any real hope of release.

During his campaign, President Trump vowed to “load up” Guantanamo with “bad dudes.” While we hope he will come to understand that Guantanamo is an expensive stain on the American conscience, at this point it appears likely that he will leave the current detainees to fester there – even those who have been cleared for release by national security experts in our own government. There is evidence though that he may be beginning to understand that by sending new prisoners to Guantanamo he would be denying justice not only to the prisoner, but also to any possible victims. Justice occurs through trial in a court of law – and that isn’t something that happens in Guantanamo. The President’s desire to seek justice (or perhaps revenge) for victims may be something we can build on to persuade him that fair trials are not only morally right, but are also the just way to address violence.

What Can We Do?

While it would be ideal to persuade President Trump to close Guantanamo, it probably isn’t likely. What we can do though, is persuade him not to send new prisoners there, or at least to send very few new prisoners there. While it is wrong to hold even one person indefinitely without trial, the hard reality is that if President Trump transfers few or no new prisoners to Guantanamo, the next President will be able to close the prison and end indefinite detention. If, on the other hand, President Trump sends many new prisoners there, then the next President may not succeed at closing Guantanamo, and indefinite detention without trial may become a permanent feature of American democracy.

You can help by:

- Organizing a rally, vigil, prayer service, or other event against Guantanamo on or near Jan. 11.
- Talking to your family, friends, and others in your community about indefinite detention at Guantanamo and the importance of ensuring that no one is imprisoned without a trial.
- Wearing an orange ribbon or pin (contact NRCAT for pins) in solidarity with those in Guantanamo.
- Writing or calling your Members of Congress about indefinite detention and Guantanamo.
- Writing to President Trump and asking him to close Guantanamo and end indefinite detention.

**For more information on Guantanamo
and action alerts for Congress and the President to close the detention center
go to www.nrcat.org/CloseGitmo**