



## **National Religious Campaign Against Torture Statement on Force-Feeding at the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center July 18, 2013**

Today, 166 people are being held at the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba. The vast majority have never been tried, convicted or even charged with any crime. More than half of them have been cleared for release or have been approved for transfer.

The detainees are being held indefinitely. Indefinite detention is not only harmful to the detainees themselves, it also diminishes the moral leadership of our nation, compromises our commitment to the rule of law, and undermines our struggle against terrorism.

Many of the Guantanamo detainees, in a nonviolent protest of their seemingly permanent detention without trial, joined a hunger strike that has been going on since February 2013. They have no other means of protesting their indefinite detention. The hunger strike is not an effort at suicide; instead, it is a means of expressing opposition to inhuman treatment. In addition to being detained without trial, many of the detainees have been tortured or abused during their time at Guantanamo.

The U.S. government has responded to the hunger strike by force-feeding more than 40 of the detainees – a painful practice that preserves life, but at the cost of the prisoner's ability to make decisions about his or her own body. The procedure often involves shackling and strapping down the detainee as a tube is inserted through the nose into the stomach.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has stated its opposition to force-feeding. The 2006 revision of the Declaration of Malta of the World Medical Association states:

“Forcible feeding is never ethically acceptable. Even if intended to benefit, feeding accompanied by threats, coercion, force or use of physical restraints is a form of inhuman and degrading treatment. Equally unacceptable is the forced feeding of some detainees in order to intimidate or coerce other hunger strikers to stop fasting.”

Based on American Medical Association policy, Dr. Jeremy Lazarus, president of the AMA, wrote in an April 25, 2013, letter to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, “Every competent patient has the right to refuse medical intervention, including life-sustaining interventions.”

Recognizing that every religion affirms the innate dignity and worth of every human being, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture opposes the force-feeding of all mentally competent prisoners who are capable of forming an unimpaired and rational judgment concerning the consequences of their refusing life-sustaining nourishment or other medical intervention.

Independent medical professionals should be allowed to evaluate the mental and physical status of hunger striking detainees at Guantanamo to determine whether force-feeding is medically appropriate. If medical professionals determine that a detainee is not mentally competent and feeding intervention is medically necessary, force-feeding is permissible. However, medical intervention should be focused on restoring those prisoners to their full mental faculties so that they can then make competent decisions about their medical treatment.

The root cause of the Guantanamo hunger strike is the continued detention of well over 100 prisoners without charge or trial. Most of the detainees have already been approved for transfer or release, and yet, they remain imprisoned with no anticipated end date. Now is the time for President Obama to transfer or release these detainees. The current crisis will be resolved only by transferring, releasing, or trying all the prisoners held at Guantanamo and finally ending this chapter in U.S. history.