

# *Hole of infamy*

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By Guillermo Alvarado

Tuesday, January 11th, was the 20th anniversary of the arrival of the first victims to the prison built by the United States in the illegal base of Guantanamo, a site that in two decades became the center of all imaginable legal and human infamies.

The facility was built in just 96 hours to hold prisoners suspected of involvement in terrorist acts, including the attacks on the World Trade Center and other targets in September 2001, who were captured during

the war against Afghanistan.

From the legal point of view, this prison was conceived as a legal black hole, where neither U.S. laws nor international conventions on the treatment of detainees or prisoners of war would work.

A total of 780 citizens from various countries, including minors, were held there, many of them kidnapped in their own country and transported on illegal flights with the complicity of numerous allies of Washington.

Only a dozen prisoners were charged and only two were convicted by military tribunals; nine died during these years, seven of apparent suicide and two of common diseases, and 39 people are still trapped in a legal limbo.

They are not prisoners of war, or "enemy combatants," a term invented by the George W. Bush administration to justify the non-application of the Geneva Convention.

As U.S. military officials acknowledged, torture is part of routine interrogation at the infamous facility.

An insight into life there is provided by the film *The Mauritanian*, based on the memoirs of Mohamedou Ould Slahi, who spent many years in Guantanamo Bay prison, including nine years after he was found innocent.

The White House has tried to disguise this violation of human rights, which it claims to defend elsewhere, and Bush himself had to recognize the jurisdiction of the Geneva Convention, although in fact it does not apply.

Prisoners, for example, can remain there all their lives without being charged with any crime or notified of any rights.

On Tuesday a group of U.N. experts demanded that the U.S. permanently close that prison where, they said, "human rights have been relentlessly violated."

Washington should do much more than that and start by returning to Cuba the territory of the Guantanamo naval base, occupied by force and against the law and the will of a people that has been sovereign since January 1, 1959.

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