

Close Guantanamo Prison -- Then Give It Back to Cuba



Havana, January 8 (RHC)-- This week marks the 13th anniversary of the arrival of the first post-9/11 prisoners to Guantanamo Bay, the most notorious prison on the planet. This grim anniversary, and the beginning of normalization of diplomatic relations between the U.S and Cuba, serves as a reminder that we need to permanently close the prison and return the land to its rightful owners, the Cuban people. It is time to put an end to this dark chapter of United States history, according to an article on Thursday by *Amy Goodman* published in *Truthdig*, a progressive journal of news and opinions.

“The detention facilities at Guantanamo for individuals covered by this order shall be closed as soon as practicable,” President Barack Obama wrote nearly six years ago, in one of his first executive orders, on January 22, 2009. Despite this, the prison remains open, with 127 prisoners left there after Kazakhstan accepted five who were released on December 30th. There have been 779 prisoners known to have been held at the base since 2002, many for more than 10 years without charge or trial. Thanks to WikiLeaks and its alleged source, Chelsea Manning, we know most of their names.

The U.S. has imposed a crushing blockade against Cuba for more than half a century, ostensibly to punish the island for its form of governance. What kind of alternative does the United States show Cubans on that corner of their island that the U.S. controls? A hellish, military prison beyond the reach of U.S. laws, where hundreds of men have been held, most without charge, and many beaten and tortured.

The United States took Guantanamo Bay by force in 1898, during the Spanish-American War, and extracted an indefinite lease on the property from Cuba in 1903. Returning Guantanamo Bay to Cuba will begin to right more than a century of wrongs that the U.S. government has perpetrated there. Most importantly, the return of the Guantanamo Bay prison and naval base will make it harder for any future war criminals, whether in the White House, the Pentagon or the CIA and their enthusiastic cheerleaders in Congress, to use Guantanamo as their distant dungeon, to inflict torture and terror on prisoners, many of them innocent, far from the eyes of the people of the United States, and far from the reach of criminal courts.

Amy Goodman is the host of “Democracy Now!,” a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on more than 1,200 stations in North America. She is the co-author of “The Silenced Majority,” a New York Times best-seller.

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