

Former Guantanamo Bay detainees to speak at Davis via satellite

Event is a fundraiser for UCD's Guantanamo Testimonials Project

By ERICA LEE
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In recent years, the politically charged issue of Guantanamo Bay has become a symbol in some activist circles for governmental corruption, as scandalous reports of prisoner abuse have surfaced from the U.S. detention camp located in southeast Cuba.

Though most Americans will never have the chance to hear a firsthand account from inside the infamous prison, for UC Davis students the opportunity presents itself this Saturday at 8 p.m. in the Sciences Lecture Hall. Tickets to the event cost \$10 and can be purchased at Freeborn Hall.

Students will have the unique opportunity to hear personal accounts

from three former detainees who will discuss their experiences with the UC Davis audience.

The event is a benefit for the Guantanamo Testimonials Project, a project conducted by the UC Davis Center for the Study of Human Rights in the Americas.

The Guantanamo Testimonials Project works "to gather testimonies of prisoner abuse in Guantanamo, to organize them in meaningful ways, to make them widely

available online and to preserve them there in perpetuity," according to the project's website.

Almerindo Ojeda, linguistics professor at UC Davis and principal investigator for the project, was motivated to

Former Guantanamo Bay Detainees Lecture

Saturday, 8 pm.
Sciences Lecture Hall

DETAINEES

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start it by his reaction to people's discussions on Guantanamo, he said.

"I could not bear to hear people discuss whether the torture was justified or not," Ojeda said. "It is never OK and it shocked me that these conversations were occurring. [UC Davis] got a grant to develop a human rights center and I thought that this would be an appropriate focus."

The three detainees — Adel Hasan Hamad, Salim Adam and Hammad Ali Amno Gad Allah — will be broadcast via videoconference from Sudan and will be interviewed by renowned broadcast journalist, Amy Goodman, host of the independent news program "Democracy Now!"

Ojeda got in contact with the three men through former UC Davis student Isma'il Kushkush, who is currently working as a journalist in his native Sudan.

Kushkush first became interested in the subject of prisoner abuse while still a student, he said.

"In 2006, I attended the Center of the Study of Human Rights in the Americas event in 2006 at Freeborn Hall that hosted Chaplain James Yee, a Muslim army chaplain in Guantanamo,

wrongly charged of espionage," Kushkush said in an e-mail interview. "The program was extremely successful in my mind. While working as a journalist in Sudan, I met and interviewed former Guantanamo detainees. I thought it would be great if we could do something similar to the James Yee program and contacted Almerindo."

Ojeda said the experiences of Hamad, Adam and Allah highlight the government's practice of arresting individuals without legitimate cause.

"[These men] were working for a charitable organization that U.S. officials believed was connected to certain terrorist groups," Ojeda said. "The U.S. government has some very wide criteria [in their arrests]. There have been instances when individuals have been suspected as supporters of terrorism because they donated money that, unbeknownst to them, ended up in the hands of a terrorist program. If you employ someone that is associated with terrorist activity, you yourself can be labeled a suspect."

"Many Arabs working in Pakistan, most who were teachers or humanitarian workers working with Afghan refugees, were all 'rounded up' indiscriminately," Kushkush said. "Arab workers, like these men, all became targets of the war on terror."

Though all three men have since been released, as with many former prisoners, U.S. officials have given no reason for their release, Ojeda said.

"These men were released with no explanation, apology or reparations," he said. "This is a general pattern. There does not seem to be any clear correlation between trial results and who gets released... 'guilty' men go free while 'innocent' men remain ... no reason is given."

Charles Walker, director of the Hemispheric Institute on the Americas, which is co-sponsoring the event, said he hopes the event provides a learning experience for students.

"We hope to shed light on how Guantanamo works and the potential abuse that takes place," he said.

Ojeda, on the other hand, hopes the event functions on an even higher level.

"I would hope that students not only walk away with a more personal knowledge of the prisoners' plight, but that they are inspired to respond in peaceful, legal ways," he said. "These men have been painted as the worst of the worst, but in most cases they are simply the unluckiest of the unluckiest. Hopefully this event will motivate attendees to speak up for justice."