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US Thinktank on Guantanamo, Leak

Mike Fuller, Special for Prensa Latina

Havana, Feb 10 (Prensa Latina) After a top commander admitted this week that there is a hidden prison on an illegal US Navy base in Guantanamo, Cuba, the director of a tireless watchdog group tells Prensa Latina about how it exposes lawless violations

of human rights in the alleged War on Terror.

- <http://humanrights.ucdavis.edu/>
- <http://www.cubavsbloqueo.cu>

The University of California at Davis Center for the Study of Human Rights in the Americas has built up since fall 2005 a massive data base on the darker side of US policy in this part of the world, and its director Almerindo Ojeda bravely agreed to share on this theme with Cuban media.

US Holds 275 Terror Suspects in Cuba

We first asked him to explain to someone who has absolutely no idea what the United States does on the island of Cuba in its Guantanamo base, and he said "At this moment, the United States holds, at its Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, about 275 individuals as prisoners of its War on Terror.

"These individuals and the 503 others that were once held there have been denied all of the protections of both national and international law, and are held and interrogated in conditions that the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations, and all human rights organizations deem tantamount to torture.

"Guantanamo was chosen as the place of detention in order to create the fiction that United States law did not apply there," he said.

Secret Camp within the Base

Ojeda had told Prensa Latina this week's admission of a secret camp in Guantanamo was related to testimony from a detainee there named Majid Khan, who in a document on <http://humanrights.ucdavis.edu> said "the US made a big mistake. and had no option but to make me top secret detainee to cover up... so the public won't know about the crime that Bush administration had committed."

Prensa Latina asked Mr. Ojeda to specifically describe the Center's dealings with Khan and other outstanding victims of

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the US war on terror and how that relates to this week's startling release by the Associated Press.

That important story says Kahn was a resident of Baltimore held for supposed plans to bomb gas stations in the United States, and was locked up in "a jailhouse so protected that its very location is top secret."

Inscrutable Ethics, Depth

Almerindo Ojeda said his Center has been carrying out a Guantanamo Testimonials Project for some time, and its goal is to gather declassified or publicly available information on prisoner abuse at the Guantanamo Naval Base, to organize it in ways that make it accessible and relevant, then post it on its website for posterity.

He said "We get our information from press reports, from lawyers that are defending the prisoners, and from prisoners that have been released. Our project has now gathered hundreds of testimonies from a score of diverse sources like prisoners and their lawyers, lawyers for the United States Government, chaplains, translators, guards, interrogators, CIA moles, the FBI, the Red Cross, military physicians, psychiatrists, and foreign intelligence personnel. The volume, detail, and diversity of the testimony we have gathered makes the allegations of abuse hard to deny.

"It was gathering the testimony from the lawyers of Majid Khan, a United States resident now held at Guantanamo, that we learned of the existence of Camp 7, a hitherto classified facility at the base," he said.

In notes from a December 2007 meeting with his attorneys available on the Center's website, it is explained that Majid chewed through the artery in his left arm in January 2006, has been on hunger strikes, lives in Camp 7, and suffers from symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

According to AP, Guantanamo commanders say that maximum security lockup is for important al-Qaida members to keep them from harming other prisoner-informants and to prevent its targeting for terrorist attack.

Future Supporters, not Adversaries

Even without taking a position on guilt or innocence, as the Center claims, anyone who studies the relationship of the United States government to human rights in the Americas is bound to run into friction.

Prensa Latina asks the thoughtful Almerindo Ojeda what he would say if he had the opportunity to direct a respectful but sincere comment to the greatest adversary of his work group.

"Our center does not have adversaries, only future supporters. To them we say this. Guantanamo may or may not hold dangerous terrorists. Yet these individuals are entitled, in either case, to a set of fundamental, inalienable, rights as individuals held during an armed conflict, as prisoners in general, and as ordinary human beings. Individuals do not cease to be human when they become terrorists, let alone terrorism suspects,

which is all we have in Guantanamo."

Outside the Barbed Wire

The human beings outside the mine fields and razor wire of the US base in their country challenged at the United Nations whether their rights were being respected, and last October that international body condemned the US blockade of Cuba in a vote of 184 to 4, with one abstention. That policy also threatens other countries while weakening and depriving the people here of essential medication, communication, family unity and much more.

On the website <http://www.cubavsbloqueo.cu> detailed descriptions can be found in English of how that hostile policy aims at damaging the collective Cuban psyche through intervening in education, banking, music, internet, sports, visual arts and religion.

The use of a War on Terror to justify illegal interventions in Central America is nothing new, and in his book *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*, Noam Chomsky traces it back to the era of Ronald Reagan.

He opened an "Office of Public Diplomacy to manufacture consent for its murderous policies in Central America. a huge psychological operation of the kind the military conducts to influence a population in denied or enemy territory."

Sound familiar?

The scientifically vigorous Almerindo Ojeda agreed "the economic blockade of Cuba is a universally decried form of economic pressure."

He cannot and did not directly say what the United States does to Cuba is psychological torture, which he characterized as "something that should be defined narrowly."

But he may be a future supporter of the idea.

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