

# LA Rally to Close Guantanamo, End US Blockade of Cuba!

*By Mark Friedman, member, International Association of Machinists, LA Hands-Off Cuba Committee.*

Dozens of activists participated in the 14<sup>th</sup> annual protest to demand **US Out of Guantanamo**, organized by the Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace..... The event was opened and chaired by Jon Krampner, coordinator of the event.

**Jewish Voices for Peace**, Jerome Palacios Myerson told the crowd:” “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Dr. King wrote these hallowed words from his Birmingham cell in 1963, the same year the embargo began. Yet, not one of the inmates held at Guantanamo Bay have been afforded due process outlined in the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution, indeed the American Bill of Rights. The injustice of Guantanamo is a threat to justice for all humanity, and after 122 years, its sustained existence as an annexed military site acts as a symbol of our collective failure to hold our leadership accountable. Free Cuba. Free America. Close Guantanamo.

“Today, we gather in unity and in the pursuit of justice to address a grave ethical failure on our nation’s conscience: the continued existence of Guantanamo Bay and other post-9/11 national security policies that single out Muslims” administrative VP of the **Muslim Public Affairs Council**, Rebecca Husaini

For over two decades this facility has tarnished the moral authority of our country on the international stage, undermining America’s core values, human rights, and the rule of law.

It symbolizes the failure of our flawed national security policies and fuels the dangerous narrative that America is at war with Islam, endangering our communities.

For years, our national security policies have scrutinized and stigmatized Muslim communities. Guantanamo Bay is emblematic of how our national security policies single out Muslims as the only major terrorist threat in the world while other threats, such as white supremacist, Hindu nationalist groups, and Israeli militants that support extremist ideologies, are overlooked.

Guantanamo does not make us safer. It makes us weaker. It undermines our credibility, erodes trust between our communities and the US government, and fuels the very extremism it claims to fight. And it endangers the lives of countless Muslims, treating them as enemies rather than as equals.

President Trump is once again following this familiar and dangerous playbook— with his new Executive Order that amounts to Muslim Ban 2.0 and by threatening to send undocumented immigrants to Guantanamo Bay. He continues to dehumanize and disenfranchise people under the guise of national security— We have seen this playbook before, and we will not allow it to be used again! These policies aren’t about keeping America safe—it’s about demonizing others.

At the end of the Biden Administration, there were 15 people who remained at Guantanamo Bay which cost U.S. taxpayers approximately \$500 million a year to maintain. With President Trump’s plans to use it as an immigration concentration center, it would increase the size to 30,000 people at the expense of

American taxpayers.”

In the words of **Muslim Public Affairs Council** President and Co-founder, Salam Al-Marayati, “Guantanamo Bay is a complete insult to the dignity, not only of those in Guantanamo Bay, but of the American people, because it does not represent the American values.” We need to “remind ourselves, and the world, who the United States is, and what it was envisioned to be by our founders.”

We stand here today to demand the closure of Guantanamo, but our fight does not end there.

We demand the dismantling of policies that treat Muslims as suspects. We demand a national security approach rooted in justice, not fear. We demand that America lives up to its promise of liberty and equality for all.

Let us fight for justice. And let us ensure that Guantanamo—and the Islamophobia it represents—becomes a chapter we have closed forever.”

Aliya Yousufi, representing the **Council on American-Islamic Relations of California** addressed the audience.

“Last year only a handful of prisoners remained in Guantanamo and now we see renewed fervor to detain a whole new generation of “undesirables” with no due process. It’s shameful. On behalf of CAIR-LA, I am grateful to the ICUJP for organizing this rally to remind the current administration of the moral and legal failing that is Guantanamo Bay prison.”

**National Lawyers Guild** President Emeritus and well-known figure in the Cuba solidarity movement also addressed the crowd.

“Once again Guantanamo Bay Prison is a place where America’s shame is unfolding for all the world to see. Initially leased from Cuba in the early 1900’s, Castro asked for it back after the Cuban Revolution but, of course, the U.S. refused. Thereafter the Cuban government refused to cash the meagre U.S. lease payments...Castro just shoved them into his desk drawer.

Guantanamo still holds a few supposed “war criminals” who, like the nearly 800 once there and who were often tortured, do not, to our everlasting shame, have the rights of prisoners of war, or other meaningful due process rights. They were and are prisoners of the U.S. war for oil, and wars against the Islamic regimes in the Muslim prisoners’ home countries. As such, they were also religious wars and racist wars against a dark-skinned, non-Christian population.

Now another manifestation of America’s shame is unfolding at Guantanamo Bay Prison. Yes, Donald Trump, America’s new authoritarian and fascist President, has decided to house tens of thousands of the millions of undocumented immigrants he intends to deport, in Guantanamo Bay Prison, until they are ready to be kicked out of this country.

Never mind that immigrants contribute far more services and economic gain to America than they receive. Never mind that millions have been here for years and years. Never mind that families will be

separated, children from parents and wives and husbands from each other. Never mind that they perform many of the hardest and most mundane jobs to keep our country functioning. Never mind that their crime rate is a fraction of what it is for us so-called “legal Americans”. Never mind the extreme hardships these immigrants, our sisters and brothers, overcame getting to this country in the first place. Never mind that the conditions in their home countries that they fled were, and often still are, the consequences of America’s imperialist exploitation of their country’s resources; never mind that that is what drove them to risk life and limb to get to America; get to America to live in peace and with enough resources to feed and care for their families.

And how will they be treated while held in Guantanamo Bay Prison? Will they, like the prisoners of war housed there for decades, be denied due process? Will they, like the Muslim prisoners before them, be tortured and humiliated?

So, brothers and sisters, this is the pledge we must all make today: That we will keep demonstrating on behalf of our sister and brother immigrants wrongly held in Guantanamo just as we have been demonstrating for our sister and brother Muslims wrongly held there! That knowing we cannot look to the politicians, be they Democrats or Republicans for relief, we will come back to the streets again and again until our immigrant sisters and brothers are finally allowed to live their lives beside us in safety, and with the respect and appreciation they deserve.

Other speakers included Ina Martinez from **Codepink**, and Mark Friedman representing the Machinists Union Local 1484 and the **LA Hands Off Cuba Committee** who reported on the national medical aid efforts for Cuba and the forthcoming “Labor and Youth Activists delegation” to Cuba for May Day sponsored by the Cuban trade union federation.

The protest was covered by KTLA-TV in Los Angeles.