

US to transfer six Guantanamo detainees to Uruguay

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US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel has notified Congress of plans to transfer six low-level detainees from the Guantanamo Bay prison camp to Uruguay. The decision, which was reportedly made over a week ago, was announced as the prison camp has come under intensifying criticism for its practices of endlessly detaining and force-feeding prisoners.

The six prisoners slated for release include four Syrians, a Tunisian and a Palestinian, all of whom have been cleared for release from the prison for at least four years. “The United States is grateful to our partner, Uruguay, for this significant humanitarian gesture,” stated Ian Moss, a US State Department spokesman, lauding Uruguayan President José Mujica for his “generous assistance as the United States continues its efforts to close the detention facility at Guantánamo.” According to the *Times*, the transferees could be released as early as next month.

A motivation for the decision to remove detainees long-slated for release is a desire to ease public criticism of the camp. One of the detainees set to be transferred—Syrian Abu Wa’el Dhiab, who has been held prisoner without charges since 2002—has launched a lawsuit against US officials’ policy of force-feeding detainees at the prison complex. His suit will likely be dropped upon his release.

In May, US Judge Gladys Kessler ordered a brief injunction against the force-feeding of Dhiab before lifting it as the Guantanamo detainee’s health deteriorated. Kessler has demanded that Guantanamo officials hand over all videos of Dhiab’s force-feeding so that she may rule on the legality of the procedure.

Enteral feeding, which occurs when a large feeding tube is forcibly inserted through the nostril and into the stomach of a detainee, was first used against Guantanamo prisoners last year in an effort to break a

hunger strike in which a near-majority of the camp’s 149 detainees participated. In December, Guantanamo Bay authorities imposed a media blackout on the strike as a means to further isolate the detainees. With the release of Dhiab and the five others, the prison camp will continue to hold 143 detainees, including over 60 others who have similarly been cleared of supposed links to terrorism.

This week, Cori Crider, an attorney for Dhiab, relayed news from the detainee that an unnamed nurse at the facility had refused to force-feed her client. “I have come to the decision that I refuse to participate in this criminal act,” she quoted him as saying. Writing in the *Guardian*, Crider called the refusal a “historic stand,” while encouraging other health providers at the facility to act similarly.

Crider states, “As someone who has watched over 10 grim hours of force-feeding footage, I can well imagine the reasons for the nurse’s change of heart. During a typical detainee force-feeding at Gitmo, a hunger-striker is strapped in a multi-point restraint chair (manufacturer’s slogan: “it’s like a padded cell on wheels”) and a 100cm tube is forced down his nose and into his stomach twice a day: it’s not a pretty process.” Crider quotes General Bantz Craddock, who refers to the process as intended to make hunger striking less “convenient.”

In keeping with the media blackout of the hunger strike, US authorities have refused to release the name of the nurse, stating that “the matter is in the hands of the individual’s leadership.” Navy Capt. Tom Gresback, a Guantanamo spokesman, stated that though “there was a recent instance of a medical provider not willing to carry out the enteral feeding of a detainee,” the act would have “no impact to medical support operations at the base.” Though health providers at the

camp are allowed to seek an exemption from having to participate in the procedure, it is doubtful the refusal will not have repercussions.

Since the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay's opening in 2002, nearly 800 prisoners have been held there, many without having a single charge brought against them. In a May congressional hearing on the status of the Bush-era Authorization of the Use of Military Force (AUMF), State Department officials representing the Obama administration told members of Congress that the president could continue to hold detainees at Guantanamo Bay whether or not the AUMF was repealed.



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