

# USA

## Who are the Guantánamo detainees?

### CASE SHEET 17

Mohammed Al-Amin

July 2006

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Mauritanian National: Mohammed Al-Amin

ISN#: 706

Age: 24

Family status: Five sisters

Occupation: Student

Born in Nouakchott, Mauritania, Mohammed al Amin travelled to Saudi Arabia in his teens to study to the *Qu'ran*, leaving behind his mother, father and five sisters. He hoped to become a teacher. He later travelled to Pakistan to further his studies. He was arrested in Pakistan following the attacks on the US mainland on 11 September 2001. He was subsequently transferred to US custody, and was transported to Afghanistan and then Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. In each of these places he alleges that he was subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. He remains in Guantánamo Bay, having never been charged with a criminal offence, over four years since his arrest.

#### **Arrest and treatment in Pakistan**

Mohammed al Amin was arrested in April 2002 in Peshawar, Pakistan. While in Pakistani custody, he told his lawyer, he was subjected to various forms of ill-treatment in order to force him to confess that he was a Saudi national. He spent two months in detention in Peshawar, where he states he was subjected to beatings, held for prolonged periods in solitary confinement and denied adequate food.

#### **Transfer to US custody, and Bagram**

*“Eventually, I told them what they wanted to hear and the torture stopped”*

In around June 2002, Mohammed al Amin was blindfolded, shackled and hooded and placed on a plane with several other detainees. He was taken to the US airbase at Bagram in Afghanistan. Mohammed al Amin was held in Bagram for two months, he told his lawyer that while there he “went through many tragedies”. He alleges that:

- he was deprived of sleep;
- he was sexually abused;

- he was tied by his hands to the ceiling for days on end. He states that whenever he lost consciousness a guard would forcefully pull him up to wake him;
  - US personnel told him that he would be transferred to Egypt to face further torture
- Mohammed al Amin stated to his lawyers that after two months of this treatment, and in order to stop the abuse, he told his captors whatever they wanted to hear. “They wanted me to say I had come to join the Jihad” he stated in 2006 “Eventually I told them what they wanted to hear and the torture stopped”.

### **Guantánamo – “even worse than Bagram”**

Without being told what was happening to him, or where he was being taken, Mohammed al Amin was again shackled, hooded and blindfolded and strapped down in a military airplane. Disoriented, and feeling dizzy and sick, the flight lasted for several hours. Mohammed al Amin was shocked when he was told that he was in the US Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. He was given the detainee number, or ISN, 706 and had his name recorded by the Department of Defense as Mohammad Lameen Sidi Mohammad.

He states that in the first year he was held in Guantánamo Bay was “terrible” and “worse than Bagram”. He states that he was subjected to sleep deprivation, sexual humiliation, and exposure to loud music. Like in Bagram he eventually relented and told his interrogators what they wanted to hear.

### **Hunger Strike**

*“The strike started to prove a point – to request that the US government prove our presence here was justified or find us innocent”*

Mohammed al Amin, like most other Guantánamo detainees, has never been charged with any crime. His interrogations have stopped; he simply languishes in the US detention facility with no ability to challenge his incarceration. Mohammed al Amin is reportedly “hopeless” and told his lawyer that his faith in the US justice system is “almost nil”. He told his lawyer that he longed for a chance to prove his innocence, or even to be charged and have access to any form of justice. “If there is really justice, within five minutes in a court, I can prove there is no case against me”

In protest at his continued indefinite detention and the lack of any charges against him, Mohammed al Amin embarked on a hunger strike in August 2005. Up to 200 detainees have participated in the strike. Al Amin states that camp authorities began force feeding hunger strikers at the end of that month.

In January 2006, the US authorities introduced a regime to more forcefully deal with those who continued the strike. Mohammed al Amin states that a new team of doctors arrived, armed with restraint chairs and thick feeding tubes, and a mandate to end the ongoing hunger strike.

When this new team arrived, Mohammed al Amin was taken out of his bed at the camp hospital and placed in solitary confinement in a cell in “Block Oscar”. In this cell, painted black and without windows, the air conditioning was left on full, leading Mohammed al Amin to describe it as a “freezer”. Guards would throw water on him to exacerbate the freezing conditions, and would wake him up if he fell asleep. At mealtimes, he would be taken to be force fed. The manner in which he was force fed may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, or torture:

- He would be placed in a restraint chair by camp guards so that he was unable to move at all
- A large tube would be forced down his nose. On one occasion it was forced against the bottom of his stomach, which caused him severe pain. The doctor then stated that they

could not find the correct position and forcefully pulled the feeding tube from him. This entire procedure was repeated two or three times. He states that the tube would cause his nose to bleed

- He was deliberately over fed until he vomited, and when he vomited the force feeding would start again
- He was strapped in the restraint chair for periods of two to three hours at a time, which coupled with being overfed, led him to urinate and defecate on himself;

After the force feeding sessions, which would last much of the day, he would be dumped, covered in his own vomit, blood and faeces, back in his isolation cell. He persisted in his strike, but after 21 days of mistreatment in the chair and isolation, he could take no more and gave up.

In his own words, “they used physicians to commit crimes”. He states that doctors would supervise the force feeding operations, watching while he was forced to vomit. On one occasion he says that a doctor asked him “are you going to quit the hunger strike or stay in this situation?”

Now, according to Mohammed al Amin, if a detainee misses a meal, all “comfort items” – such as reading materials, clothes – are removed, leaving the detainee in his cell with a thin mattress and a blanket.

# TAKE ACTION FOR Mohammed Al-Amin

## **Write to the US authorities:**

- Calling for Mohammed al Amin to be released from Guantánamo unless charged and tried in accordance with international standards of fairness in a court that will not impose the death penalty;
- Urge them to immediately investigate all allegations that Mohammed al Amin has been tortured in US custody in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Guantánamo Bay, and to ensure that all those found responsible are punished
- Calling for them to keep Mohammed al Amin’s family fully informed of his status, health and well-being, and ensure adequate communication with his family;
- Calling for them to close the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay and either release the detainees held there or charge and try them in accordance with international standards in a court that may not impose the death penalty
- Urging the US authorities to establish an independent and impartial commission of inquiry into all aspects of the US’ “war on terror” detention policies and practices;

## **Write to the Mauritanian authorities:**

- Asking what measures they are taking to ensure that Mohammed al Amin is either charged with a recognisably criminal offence or released
- Asking whether they have raised concerns with the US authorities over allegations that Mohammed al Amin was tortured in US custody;
- Calling on them to publicly state that, if returned to Mauritania, Mohammed al Amin will not be subject to further human rights violations, and will be released if he is not charged and tried in accordance with international standards of fairness.

**Write to the Pakistani authorities:**

- Calling on the Pakistani authorities to investigate all allegations that Mohammed al Amin was tortured while in Pakistani custody, and to bring all those found responsible to justice
- Calling on the Pakistani authorities to set up a commission of inquiry into all cases of “disappearance” and illegal transfers into US custody

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