

A letter to William Hague

William Hague MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London, SW1A 2AH

Dear Foreign Secretary,

I am writing to you in connection with two particular topics: the closure of the US prison at Guantánamo Bay, and British complicity in torture.

As you know, between 2004 and 2007, the Labour government secured the release of all the British nationals held in Guantánamo, and all but one of the British residents. The government pressed for the return of the remaining resident, Shaker Aamer, who has a British wife and four British children, and was cleared for release from Guantánamo in 2007, but was unsuccessful in its endeavours. Given our special relationship with the US, which, as you recently stated, should be “solid not slavish”, I urge you to do all in your power to secure his immediate release.

As well as securing the release of Shaker Aamer, I would also like to ask you to help President Obama close Guantánamo by offering homes in the UK to other prisoners cleared for release by the President’s Task Force, out of the many dozens of men who cannot be repatriated because of fears that they will be tortured or subjected to other ill-treatment, and who, as a result, are effectively stateless.

One suitable candidate is Ahmed Belbacha, an Algerian man who lived in Bournemouth and cannot return to Algeria for fear for his life. Mr. Belbacha was also cleared for release in 2007, and yet he remains in Guantánamo because no other country will take him, and because the Labour government, which could so easily have offered him a new home, turned its back on him.

By offering a home to Mr. Belbacha, the UK would join an illustrious list of other European countries — Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and Switzerland — who have accepted cleared prisoners on a purely humanitarian basis. There are no reasons for the British government not to accept a small number of prisoners on a humanitarian basis to help close Guantánamo Bay.

On a related topic, I also ask you to maintain the position regarding British complicity in torture abroad, which you held so tenaciously in opposition. I have not forgotten that, in 2006, you told a meeting in the House of Commons organized by Human Rights Watch, “Reports of prisoner abuse by British and American troops — however isolated — and accounts, accurate or not, of the mistreatment of detainees at Guantánamo and extraordinary rendition flights leading to the torture of suspects, have led to a critical erosion in our moral authority. In standing up for the rule of law, we must be careful not to employ methods that undermine it.”

I have also not forgotten that, in February this year, after the Court of Appeal ordered David Miliband to release a summary of documents relating to the torture of Binyam Mohamed in Pakistan in 2002, which the foreign secretary had been attempting to suppress for 18 months, you told the House of Commons that the Conservative Party has “consistently argued for full investigation of all credible allegations of UK complicity in torture, and for the Government to find a way in this particular case to balance the needs of national security with the need for justice and accountability in our democratic society.”

As a result, I hope to hear that you will be ordering a public inquiry into the intelligence services’ involvement in torture, as called for by David Cameron on 11 March.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,