

Civil rights attorney discusses Guantanamo Bay issues

Many prisoners not linked with al-Qaida, none convicted of a crime

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Guantanamo Bay only links 8 percent of its detainees with al-Qaida, and holds no convicted criminals, according to government records.

"Only 8 percent have been shown to be al-Qaida fighters. These figures are from the government's own records. None of this is classified," said Frank Goldsmith, a civil rights attorney and representative of one of the detainees at Guantanamo Bay.

Goldsmith spoke to crowd of roughly 50 people at UNC Asheville last week.

"Fifty-five percent were shown by government records not to have committed any hostile act against the United States. The law says to be detained, you have to have committed a hostile act. Of these numbers of detainees at the prison, none have been convicted of a crime. Again, these are government records."

Guantanamo Bay is a U.S. detention facility located in Cuba.

Since Oct. 7, 2001, when the United States invaded Afghanistan, 775 detainees were brought to Guantanamo. Of these, approximately 420 were released without charge. In January 2009, approximately 245 detainees remained. This number further decreased to 215 by last November, according to government statistics.

UNC Asheville students said statistics about the prison clarified the issue, and showed them how the United States treats international laws. The numbers made them feel more aware of how the government views itself in relation to the rest of the world.

"It really does help put things into perspective, being able to see numbers," said Dylan Duffey, a UNCA student. "And seeing how you have politicians who are saying they are going to fix the problems and everything, and getting



Shawn Hiatt- Staff Photographer

Attorney Frank Goldsmith discusses the statistics and legal issues of the detention facility in Cuba. Goldsmith represents one of the remaining detainees at the center.

to see numbers that show how transfers have dropped since Obama has taken office is good."

While President Obama continues to send detainees to the prison, he has not sent nearly as many as the Bush administration did.

Many consider Guantanamo Bay a place where the worst of the worst terrorists are kept, according to Goldsmith. However, he said the prison is holding non-violent individuals without evidence.

"One of the early releases was described as being a shriveled old African man who was partially deaf. Another was a 90-year-old who walked around with a cane and would say, 'No more ques-

tions,' and would then stare out of the window. That is all the information you would get out of him," Goldsmith said. "There were boys between the ages of 13 to 15 years old who were sold to the Americans, and were kicked and beaten by U.S. soldiers."

Torture, according to the United Nations Against Torture, is an act that causes mental or physical pain to gain information, or inflicting punishment for a committed act or punishment based on discrimination. The Army Field Manual, a set of rules established for war, prohibits the use of torture toward prisoners captured in battle.

Despite this, torture has been an issue with the prison.

The Bush administration was scrutinized for the use of torture to gain information. According to Goldsmith, guards have been known to pepper spray prisoners while they are sleeping, and commit other violent and humiliating acts toward them. The Bush administration wrote a loophole that created definitions of torture in order to protect itself.

"By signing these international conventions, we obligated ourselves to enact just such legislation," Goldsmith said. "Even though the field manual says it could not be unpleasant, they say what they were doing is not considered torture