

Larry Siems

April 2, 2016

Dear members of the Periodic Review Board:

I am writing to convey my admiration and support for Mohamedou Ould Slahi, and to express my hope that this Periodic Review Board hearing will initiate a process that will finally see Mr. Slahi reunited with his family. In the course of editing Mr. Slahi's remarkable *Guantánamo Diary*, I have come to see this reunion as long overdue. I believe that Mr. Slahi should be free to devote his considerable gifts to building a future for himself and for his family. I believe, too, that those gifts include a unique and impressive literary talent—a talent that he hopes to develop as a fiction writer, and one that I very much intend to work with him to pursue.

To be clear: I have never met Mohamedou Ould Slahi. I was not permitted to visit him or communicate with him in any way while I was preparing his manuscript for publication. This meant that I had to work through on my own the questions of credibility and trust that editors inevitably confront when publishing personal accounts of important and traumatic events. These are challenging questions for any editor, and even more for an editor who must stand behind a manuscript written by a man whose potential readers will have heard is among the “worst of the worst” and someone who is determined to do them harm.

The ordeal Mr. Slahi recounts in his *Guantánamo Diary*, moreover, is one that I personally would not have wished to believe. That a man could leave his home and turn himself in for questioning in Mauritania, only to be spirited at the behest of the United States to an intelligence prison in Jordan for interrogation; that the family he had left at home would be told nothing of his whereabouts or fate; that he would be retrieved from Jordan and sent to Afghanistan and then Guantánamo, again without the knowledge of his family; and that in Guantánamo he would endure treatment worse than he received in Jordan, treatment that clearly violated U.S. and international prohibitions against cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment and torture—in both its broad outlines and day-to-day details, its story that strains my understanding of justice and human rights, and of my country's commitment to those core values. These are heavy allegations, to borrow a phrase from Mr. Slahi, and ones that many readers who encounter Mr. Slahi's story for the first time struggle to comprehend.

But near the end of his manuscript, which he composed in a Guantánamo cell over a decade ago, Mr. Slahi wrote,

*I have only written what I experienced, what I saw, and what I learned first-hand. I have tried not to exaggerate, nor to understate. I have tried to be as fair as possible, to the U.S. government, to my brothers, and to myself.*

From everything that I have been able to learn about Mr. Slahi's detention and interrogation—from press accounts, from court records, from executive and legislative investigations, documents, and reports, and from his family members—that is exactly what he has done. By far the most impressive thing about Mr. Slahi's manuscript is not the extremity of the

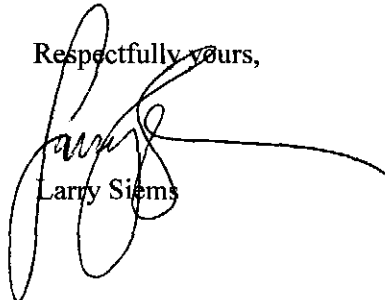
events and experiences that he relates, which is depicted in detail in the extensive public record as well, but the profound honesty and fairness of his account.

At its heart, Mr. Slahi's *Guantánamo Diary* is an act of faith in those two essential human principles. It is a faith that I recognize and share, and one that gives me hope for these proceedings. I have no doubt that the Board will see Mr. Slahi's commitment to these principles during the Review Board process. And I believe, based on everything that I have come to know about Mr. Slahi and his very troubling experience in U.S. custody, that any process that is rooted in these same principles will bring a favorable recommendation in his case.

I am confident, too, that that Board will see many other personal qualities that suggest a bright, peaceful, and productive future for Mr. Slahi. These include curiosity, wit, and empathy, the qualities that I value most in my own friends, family, and professional colleagues. They also include the essential talents of a writer: a rich intelligence, a respect for words and a fascination with language, and an ability to convey not just what he has experienced, but how others experienced those same events, and what those shared experiences mean. And they include the very rare gift of being able to reach across deep cultural divides and find ways to understand, laugh, forgive, and connect—a gift that feels more vital and necessary every day, in his part of the world and in ours.

In short, Mr. Slahi has much to contribute, to his family, to his community and country, and—as he has already with his *Guantánamo Diary*—to the entire world. His family, I know, looks forward to welcoming him home. For my part, I look forward to meeting him in person; to encouraging his aspiration to write short stories, novels, and other works of literary fiction; and to working with him to bring these future projects to print. Through it all, I look forward to transforming a strange, challenging, but deeply enriching editor-writer relationship into one in which we are simply colleagues and friends.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry Siems", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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