



Because Freedom Can't Protect Itself.

As inauguration day approached, another date also loomed large: Six days after the inauguration of President Obama, the U.S. was scheduled to begin the first trial of a child soldier accused of war crimes since World War II.

This American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) video, “Obama’s Child Soldiers” at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14uxXEel3gA&feature=channel_page, was produced as part of a so-far-successful to mobilize the public to demand that President Obama take swift action to end the unconstitutional military commissions. Though President Obama’s executive orders have suspended the military commissions and brought much-welcome changes and promises, they do not address U.S. treatment of child soldiers. The ACLU and its human rights partners are determined to bring the United States back in line with the treaties it has signed regarding the treatment of juveniles who have been recruited or used in armed conflict.

Here is some background to the video: Canadian citizen Omar Khadr was 15 years old when he was captured in Afghanistan in the midst of a firefight that seriously injured Khadr and resulted in the death of a U.S. soldier. Khadr was sent to Guantánamo where he was held for 7 years – one-third of his life. He was beaten, subject to painful stress positions and even used as a human mop after he urinated on the floor during one interrogation. Under these conditions, the prosecution of Khadr raises grave concerns about the rule of law and underscores the unconstitutionality of the military commissions.

Child soldier and ACLU client Mohammed Jawad also potentially faces trial within this illegal system. Jawad was sent to Guantanamo after he was captured at about age 16 at the scene of a grenade attack in Afghanistan that injured two U.S. soldiers. Afghan authorities threatened Jawad and his family with death, if Jawad didn’t confess to the attack. Based on the resulting false confession, Jawad was transferred to U.S. custody where he was further abused. Among other forms of cruel treatment he suffered at Guantanamo, Jawad was subjected to the so-called frequent flyer program, where he was moved every few hours – 12 times over two weeks – to deny him sleep. Despite President Obama’s executive order halting military commission proceedings, his Justice Department continues to move forward with the Bush administration’s last minute effort to deny Jawad his right to challenge his detention in federal court. For further information on Jawad’s case, including updates and a video, visit <http://www.aclu.org/safefree/detention/38714res20090113.html>

In addition to Khadr and Jawad, at least two more young men who were juveniles at the time of their capture are being held at Guantanamo.

Photo of Omar Khadr

