

PERIODIC REVIEW BOARD, 21 APRIL 2015
ABDUL SHALABI, ISN 042
OPENING STATEMENT OF PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE

Good morning ladies and gentlemen of the board. We are the personal representatives for Abdul Shalabi, who prefers to be called Abdul Rahman. Also in attendance today is Abdul Rahman's private counsel, Ms. Julia Tarver Mason-Wood. During the past three months we had the opportunity to meet with Abdul Rahman on multiple occasions, while each time gaining a better insight into his character, and future plans and desires to become fully re-integrated into society as a productive member. This future includes reuniting with his family back home in Saudi Arabia, joining his siblings to help run a well-established business, taking care of his ailing mother, and getting married and having children. Abdul Rahman left behind his mother, two brothers and three sisters, with whom he is very close. Each of his immediate family members, with the exception of his oldest sister who cannot read or write, has written letters to the board in support of his release. Both of his brothers are very successful within their own respective career fields ranging from real estate to business contracting, and are eager to have Abdul Rahman join their business. Prior to his detention, Abdul Rahman was one semester short of obtaining his university degree and if given the opportunity, he is very much looking forward to completing his final semester. Abdul Rahman's family is eagerly awaiting his return. His brothers have already arranged for all the necessary amenities and set up an apartment for him [REDACTED]. Additionally, Abdul Rahman's mother and sisters are dedicated to finding a suitable partner for him to marry.

Abdul Rahman is very optimistic and sincere about participating in the many prospects that await him in his home country. The government of Saudi Arabia has long been known to provide all the necessary tools and support for a successful rehabilitation and reintegration program for detainees transferred home, including appropriate security and humane treatment assurances to facilitate the transfer of detainees. Abdul Rahman is very eager and willing to participate in this rehabilitative process if permitted to do so. Pursuant to these assurances, the United States has transferred over 100 detainees to Saudi Arabia, including Abdul Rahman's nephew who has successfully reintegrated into society and started a family, all with the support of Abdul Rahman's family.

I would also be remiss if I don't take this opportunity to speak on behalf of Abdul Rahman regarding his long term hunger striking. According to his unclassified dossier, Abdul Rahman would be characterized as noncompliant. Although it is looked upon as a negative factor in the overall issue relating to compliance, it's important to emphasize that hunger striking is not an illegal act, but rather a non-violent and peaceful means of protesting camp conditions and

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continued detainment. Abdul Rahman has stated on multiple occasions that if hunger striking was illegal, he would have immediately ceased such protest. During our over 30 plus hours of meeting, Abdul Rahman has demonstrated nothing short of sincerity, professionalism, and intent to forget the past and look forward. Abdul Rahman has never exhibited any aggressive or violent behavior, or any animosity towards the United States or non-Muslims. As a teacher of Islam, Abdul Rahman believes Islam is a peaceful religion and he does not support terrorism or any groups that kill innocent people in the name of Islam. For these reasons, we fully support Abdul Rahman and wholeheartedly believe that he does not pose a significant and continued threat to the security of the United States.

We understand the board has been presented with historical data leading up to Abdul Rahman's detention. However given an opportunity to review our submissions while being able to see him face to face and ask the tough questions, we hope you will consider the whole picture and realize that Abdul Rahman is a compassionate and deserving man of a second chance in life. He should no longer be negatively characterized as a significant and continued threat to the United States. We ask that you approve Abdul Rahman for transfer so that he may spend the remainder of his days in peace and in the security of his mother, brothers, and sisters. We thank you for this opportunity and are standing by to address any questions or concerns you may have.

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**OPENING STATEMENT OF
PRIVATE COUNSEL JULIA TARVER MASON WOOD**

Good morning. My name is Julia Tarver Mason Wood and I am the private counsel for Abdul Rahman Shalabi. Thank you for the opportunity to represent Mr. Shalabi in this review process.

I have represented Mr. Shalabi, on a pro bono basis, for almost a decade and have had numerous in-person meetings and telephone calls with him over the years. Mr. Shalabi is no longer the young man in his twenties who left his home and family in Saudi Arabia and went to Afghanistan. Today, as he approaches his 40th birthday, he seems much older than his 40 years. Yet even in his ailing physical health, he is intent to turn a corner in his life and now wants nothing more but to return to live in peace with his mother, sisters and brothers in Saudi Arabia.

Through our written submission and our discussion with you today, I hope that you will see a man who has matured from his youthful past and is ready to turn the page. I want to emphasize at the outset that Mr. Shalabi believes in the Periodic Review Board process and has been eager to participate since he first learned that he was notified for a hearing. Over the past few months, he has worked diligently and patiently with his Personal Representatives and us to prepare for today's hearing.

More than anything else, Mr. Shalabi desires to return home to his family in Saudi Arabia to be reunited with his mother, two brothers and three sisters. From the very first telephone call that Mr. Shalabi had to tell his family that he had been scheduled for a PRB hearing before this body, several family members set out immediately to write letters enthusiastically supporting his transfer home. As you can see from their moving statements, Mr. Shalabi is very close with his family, particularly his mother, [REDACTED], and they fully support his transition home. This support will enable Mr. Shalabi to lead a peaceful and productive life when he returns. His oldest brother [REDACTED] has already registered and furnished an apartment for Mr. Shalabi [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and his younger brother, [REDACTED] are the owners of successful real estate and construction businesses and they intend to employ Mr. Shalabi as soon as he is ready to begin work. Additionally, Mr. Shalabi's mother and sister are devoted to finding him a suitable wife, so that he can realize his dream of getting married and having children.

Now, these aren't just the words of a hopeful family. Or a naïve family. These are assurances that you can trust from a family with a *proven track record*. Back in November 2007, Mr. Shalabi's own nephew, Sultan Ahmed Dirdeer Musa Al Uwaydha (ISN 059), was repatriated to Saudi Arabia. With the support of Mr. Shalabi's family, Mr. Uwaydha graduated from the Saudi Arabia Rehabilitation Care Program, got married, and started his own family. In Mr. Shalabi's own words, his nephew received a

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chance at a peaceful life, took it, and does not look back. Mr. Shalabi is hopeful for the same opportunity, and I urge the Board to strongly take into account the demonstrated success of Mr. Shalabi's family and the Saudi rehabilitation program in preventing Mr. Uwaydha from engaging in any hostile activities after his release.

Like his nephew, Mr. Shalabi is eager to participate in the Saudi Arabia rehabilitation program and will cooperate fully with any stipulations his country places upon him. I would like to direct your attention to the attached statement from the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Interior, pledging that Mr. Shalabi will be welcomed home with the same security and human treatment assurances that have facilitated the transfer of over 100 detainees from Guantanamo to Saudi Arabia, including former hunger strikers, such as Ahmed Zaid Salem Zuhair (ISN 669). We have also provided you with a comprehensive memorandum that provides color on the Saudi rehabilitation program, explains why it has been successful in rehabilitating countless other former Guantanamo detainees, and further analyzes the reasons why Mr. Shalabi should be repatriated to his home country.

Nevertheless, Mr. Shalabi is open to being resettled in another country if that would expedite his transfer out of Guantanamo. As in Saudi Arabia, he would seek to rehabilitate himself and live a peaceful life. Wherever Mr. Shalabi goes, he wishes to settle down, get married and have a family of his own, and put the past behind him.

Finally, Mr. Shalabi wants to make clear that he harbors no ill will to the United States, the American people, and non-Muslims. Mr. Shalabi recognizes that he has struggled with his thirteen-year confinement. He has been on a peaceful, but long term, hunger strike since 2005. At times, his frustration with the conditions of confinement has lead him to act out and be uncooperative with the detention staff. But Mr. Shalabi's behavior is not rooted in ill will towards the United States. Instead, he has exercised a peaceful means of protest by refusing to consume food and has largely cooperated with the enteral feedings he has been provided on a daily basis over the last nine years. Mr. Shalabi's doctors will tell you that it is not uncommon for individuals in Mr. Shalabi's condition to attempt to exercise these basic forms of control over aspects of their daily life.

As he will explain to you, Mr. Shalabi is a teacher of Islam, which he believes is a religion of peace, not war. Mr. Shalabi will tell you that he does not support terrorism or the killing of innocent people; he steadfastly believes that such acts are contrary to the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed. Furthermore, in assessing Mr. Shalabi's behavior in detention, I encourage you to consider the written statements from Mr. Shalabi's doctors as well as the live testimony that they will provide to you later today.

The bottom line is that Mr. Shalabi wishes to move beyond the past and look to the future. He is committed to spending his remaining days in peace with his family. Based on his testimony, his doctor's testimony, his family's statements, his family's prior success in rehabilitating his nephew, as well as the success of the Saudi rehabilitation

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program in rehabilitating similarly situated individuals, Mr. Shalabi should not be considered a significant and continuing threat to the security of the United States.

I urge the Board to approve Mr. Shalabi for transfer to Saudi Arabia and recommend that he be transferred as soon as possible to begin his rehabilitation. Thank you.

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