

PERIODIC REVIEW BOARD SUBSEQUENT HEARING, 23 FEB 2016
MUHAMMAD al-ANSI, ISN 029
PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE OPENING STATEMENT

Good morning ladies and gentlemen of the Board. We are the Personal Representatives of Muhammad al-Ansi. We will be assisting Mr. al-Ansi this morning with his case, aided by his Counsel, Ms. Lisa Strauss.

Mr. al-Ansi has earnestly participated in the Periodic Review Process. He has maintained a record of perfect attendance for meetings with his Personal Representatives and Counsel.

Mr. al-Ansi has conducted himself in a professional manner throughout all engagements with Counsel and his representatives. We would characterize his personality as very reserved, yet warm.

He has a proven history of compliant behavior while detained at Guantanamo. He has also constructively engaged with the Joint Task Force Medical Staff in order to deal with chronic health issues. This constructive teamwork has greatly improved his physical condition and quality of life. He has since resolutely pursued a daily regimen of self care which includes cardiovascular activities such as treadmill and elliptical training.

He has taken advantage of all the opportunities for education and personal enrichment while detained at Guantanamo. These opportunities include courses in mathematics, science, English, Spanish, life skills, computers, health and art. He has a record of outstanding academic performance and has proven to be a prolific artist, producing over 200 quality works of art. We have provided examples of his coursework and art in his case submission.

Mr. al-Ansi is fortunate to have a very supportive family remaining in Yemen comprised of his Mother, three brothers and one sister. The family has willingly pledged to support his transition to the utmost of their ability.

Later, Mr. al-Ansi will discuss both his past life and his desire for a better life for himself in the future. We are confident that Mr. al-Ansi's desire to pursue a better way of life if transferred from Guantanamo is genuine and that he does not represent a continuing or significant threat to the security of the United States of America. He is open to transfer to any country, but would prefer an Arabic speaking country if possible.

Thank you for your time and attention. We are pleased to answer any questions you have throughout this proceeding.

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MOHAMMED AL-ANSI, ISN 029
PRIVATE COUNSEL OPENING STATEMENT, (LISA STRAUSS)

I am very grateful to be here today to speak on behalf of my client, Muhammad al Ansi. I would also like to thank the Personal Representatives, who have taken time away from their families to meet with Muhammad in connection with this process.

I am a partner at the law firm of Bondurant, Mixson & Elmore, LLP, in Atlanta, Georgia, where for the last fourteen years, I have primarily represented corporations and individuals in business disputes. Before joining the firm, I served as a law clerk in the federal district court in Atlanta. I have represented Muhammad since 2008. I have dedicated over two thousand hours to his case, and have traveled to the base over twenty times.

By now, the Board is familiar with statements from private counsel detailing their clients' Guantanamo education, the willingness of families to welcome detainees home, and their client's lack of hostility to the United States. Muhammad also has these same factors supporting his clearance for release, as detailed by the declarations of each of his siblings and mother, letters from his instructors at Guantanamo, and his remarkably low record of disciplinary infractions. I would like instead to focus on some unique circumstances that also help his position.

But first, looking to the future, my law firm has a longstanding relationship with the Carter Center in Atlanta. The Carter Center was founded in 1982 by President Carter and his wife Rosalynn in partnership with Emory University and its mission is "to advance peace and health worldwide." My law firm previously represented another detainee who was released in 2007. The Carter Center took an active role in that detainee's swift repatriation to his home country, where it was questionable whether he would be welcomed. The Carter Center has pledged to similarly assist Mr. al Ansi with resettlement if this Periodic Review Board determines he is no longer a threat, and we have submitted a letter to that affect. As the Carter

Center's website states: "[t]he Center believes that people can improve their own lives when provided with the necessary skills, knowledge, and access to resources." As a philanthropic organization that has significant resources, the Carter Center could provide this added layer of support and supervision.

A second supporting factor is that I represent only one client in Guantanamo, unlike some of the larger law firms and organizations. As a result, I estimate that I have spent close to three hundred hours with Muhammad over the past eight years. I could say that I have watched him mature, but it would be more correct to say that we have matured together. I knew that he was artistic, even in the beginning. His initial drawings were simple – ballpoint pen on the backs of letters we sent – and they often depicted hands in chains, tears, and metaphors for sadness and injustice. These drawings reflect our early conversations, which often focused on his frustrations over the typical prison injustices: insufficient supplies, bad food, petty disputes with guards, and medical problems.

But a few years ago, Muhammad began painting in earnest. Encouraged by his peers, he began attending art lessons. He started painting on canvas and whatever paper he could find, using oils, pastels and water colors. They are mostly peaceful landscapes – mountains, oceans, tropical locations, and a few scenes from his homeland. He told me they reflect where he longs to travel. We have included a commendation of achievement for his artwork by the instructor in the prison and a small sampling of his work. This year he made cards for other detainees to send holiday notes and greetings home. I have collected over two hundred of his paintings and drawings.

He is at peace with his fellow detainees and the guards as reflected in the minimal disciplinary infractions, none serious and none physical.

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A third unique fact is that Muhammad's respect and admiration for American culture is not new or recently undertaken. We have always discussed movies, television, food, magazines, and my situation as a working wife and mother. He loves the Fast & Furious movie series; he loves The Walking Dead (a zombie television program filmed in my hometown); he loves National Geographic. He respects women and speaks often of his yearning to fall in love and have children. Indeed, at our first meeting over seven years ago, I wondered whether he would accept a young female attorney. But he shook my hand, told me not to bother with head coverings and/or bringing my male colleagues solely to interact with him on my behalf.

This attitude is indicative of the more secular and Westernized culture to which Muhammad was exposed because of his father's employment at a Saudi oil company and his elementary schooling in Saudi Arabia. The recent photographs in his file of his brothers, nieces, and nephews could have been taken in the United States given their Western dress, sunglasses, and grooming, including their clean shaven faces, which is of particular cultural significance.

I have had numerous conversations with his family, going through their statements in great detail as they have a great respect for the significance of the oaths they have taken. They have been very gracious and respectful for my help and the legal process, and I can hear through the phone the heart break they have suffered from Muhammad's long absence. They are sincerely willing to do anything it takes to secure his release, including selling valuable land in the event they need additional funds, although they do not think that will be necessary. They recognize that Yemen may not be the best place for Muhammad to start a new life given the political unrest that has affected university study and reduced employment opportunities. They have pledged to help Muhammad financially if relocated to a third country, to secure medical and psychological treatment for him, and for some family members to join him for long-term visits. Alternatively, they are willing to welcome him home, to shelter and provide for him there, and to help get him on his feet. Of course, they tell me their top priority is to get him married, and I think he would agree.

Muhammad has never expressed hostility towards the United States or any desire for retribution. We have discussed his differences with the guards and interrogators over the years but he understands that they have a job to do and that they are working under difficult circumstances.

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Finally, I understand that is this not the venue to address the legal basis of Mr. al Ansi's detention. However, we previously disputed the factual and legal basis for his detention in his habeas action, and those disputes remain unresolved. Even the unclassified dossier reflects the uncertainty about his past by using words like "may" and "probably." In 2001, he was under 20 years old, his education incomplete, and he lacked the strategic or technical skills required to plan or carry out any threatening attacks on any party. Nothing about his time in Guantanamo changes that assessment.

I respectfully request that you clear him for release and resettlement wherever you deem in his best interests.