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Doha  
Qatar

4 November 2008

Amnesty International USA  
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Dear friends,

I was detained for more than six years by the U.S. government, primarily in the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay. In late 2001, I was a journalist with the news agency al-Jazeera, assigned to cover the war in Afghanistan. While on that assignment, I was detained at the border of Pakistan-Afghanistan, and transferred to U.S. custody. I found that I had entered into a nightmare that would claim six years of my life and place great hardship on my family.

Fortunately, Amnesty International and other organizations called attention to my case and campaigned on my behalf. In December last year, my case was featured in Amnesty International's Global Write-a-thon. A few months later, I was released from Guantanamo in May 2008 without any charges.

I received more than 20,000 letters from members and supporters of Amnesty International during my last two years at Guantanamo Bay. I received letters from all over the world – the United States, South America, all over Europe, Japan and Asia, many countries. These letters really encouraged me during my very difficult time. They made me feel as though I was not alone and not to give up. The writers encouraged me, they said they would advocate for me and pray for me. Some people sent me songs, others poetry. I really appreciated it when people sent me letters telling me about themselves. The letters where the person told me about their life, their occupation and what they did were very good for me – especially when they sent a picture of the place they lived. Also, the letters where the person told me about their family, if they were missing someone themselves, if they also had been through a hard time previously. I felt as though people had not forgotten me through these letters and I felt something change in my life for the better from these letters.

Also, I felt and could notice that from all of these letters, the Administration of Guantanamo Bay changed and approved towards me, as they knew I was not alone and I had people who cared about me. The guards said to me that they could see I was someone who mattered and must be important because of all the letters – this made them respect me more.

Finally, all of these letters from Amnesty International led me to think about human rights. I thought about why would all of these people write to me, a stranger, and want to help and encourage me? Why would these people who are from a different country, religion, race – everything – want to work for me and wish good things for me and for me to be released?

This made me to understand about human rights and for me to decide to work in human rights and to help people upon my release. This is why I am now working for Al Jazeera and they have opened a new desk called "Public Liberties and Human Rights". We want to work for human rights all over the world and to help those people who need the help of others. I hope, *enshallah*, to continue this work for all of my life.

I ask you to join this year's Global Write-a-thon and help make a difference in the lives of people who are facing great adversity. Prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders risk their own freedom to fight for the rights of all. They deserve our support.

Participating in the Write-a-thon is as easy as writing a letter. You can either pledge to write letters by yourself, or you can join with others at home, school, church or elsewhere in your community. Please know that whatever you write – how long or short – means so much to the people you write to. To learn more about the Global Write-a-thon, visit Amnesty's website.

Last year, Write-a-thon participants around the world sent more than 150,000 letters to fight injustice and support those whose rights had been abused. Writing a letter may seem like a simple action that can't possibly bring about big changes. But when your letters combine with those sent by thousands of others across the globe, they become an echoing cry for justice that can not be ignored. Your actions can make a difference. Believe me, I know.

Please join the Global Write-a-thon, and thank you again to Amnesty International and to all of those who wrote and encouraged during my hard time.

Sincerely,

Sami al Hajj  
4 November 2008

