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Journalist recalls living hell at Guantanamo

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KUALA LUMPUR: A journalist from Al Jazeera, who was detained in Guantanamo Bay for seven years, yesterday described his detention as a "living hell".

Sami AlHajj, a 40-year-old Sudanese who was released on May 1, 2008, told the Criminalise War Conference he was beaten, stripped naked, deprived of sleep, and force-fed through a tube.

His captors also mocked his religion.

"There were psychiatrists who were part of the programme to psychologically break us," he said.

He claimed that five of the detainees were driven to their deaths by the American soldiers.

Sami was detained by the Pakistani authorities at the Afghanistan border in 2001, after being mistaken for his colleague Tassir Alony, who was wanted by the United States for information on Taliban and Osama bin Laden, whom Tassir had interviewed after the Sept 11 attacks in New York and Washington.

He believes he was a victim of the Pakistani authorities who were eager to hand over people to the US for a bounty of US\$5,000 (RM17,129) for each person.

He was first detained at the Bangram detention centre in Afghanistan for six months before being transported to Guantanamo.

"We were shackled in a hunched posi-

tion with hoods placed over our heads and fitted with ear plugs to cut us off completely from what was happening around us," Sami said.

"My legs were numb from having to hunch for several hours during the journey from Pakistan, and then I was forced to stand up and pushed out of the plane, causing me to fall and break my legs at the knees."

He now depends on a walking stick.

Sami said the 20-hour journey from Kandahar to Guantanamo was harrowing.

He said that although the Americans realised he was not the person they wanted, they were reluctant to release him probably because they feared he would expose the atrocities he witnessed at the detention centres, which held children as young as 11 and men as old as 95.

He appealed to representatives of countries attending the conference to take in prisoners released from Guantanamo who have nowhere to go.

"I appeal to all of you to find homes for men who were tortured and detained without trial so that they can lead normal and meaningful lives," he said.

"The torture has not ended. The reality



is there are 212 detainees at Guantanamo still suffering under the Obama regime."

Sami said many of those released were sent home only to be imprisoned in their own countries, such as Tunisia, Libya and Morocco.

"This is despite the fact that they were detained without any sound reason and without trial for so many years," he said.

"Those who have to return to China face the possibility of being imprisoned and tortured worse than they were in Guantanamo Bay."

He said the largest group at the detention centre now consists of 97 Yemenis.

Sami ...
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