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Global Security Forum features Gitmo detainee lawyer

By **Rebecca Wyatt Thomas**, OU Web Writer

The Third Annual Global Security Forum will feature Doris Tennant, an attorney and pro bono representative of a Guantanamo Bay detainee. Through her lecture "Behind the Scenes at Guantanamo Bay: A Lawyer's Story," Tennant will raise awareness of the detainees who have served for many years without any charges being brought against them. The forum will be held Friday, April 4 from 2:30 p.m. in the Oakland Center Banquet Room A.

After a number of suicides at Guantanamo Bay in 2006, Tennant and her law partner Ellen Lubell decided they had to do something to help out the detainees. They began working with the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York to offer their services, pro-bono, to a detainee in Guantanamo Bay.

"We really felt committed to proceeding with it because we just kept hearing about what was happening in Guantanamo Bay and how the rule of law was being ignored," Tennant said. As attorneys, they felt the need to step in and help.

Tennant said there are nearly 400 lawyers in the country who are representing detainees.

"It's heartening to see so many lawyers who care enough to work so hard and firms that are willing to support the effort. Some have millions of dollars invested in this," Tennant said.

Tennant and Lubell are one of a few small firms taking on the challenge of representing a detainee. Tennant said many large firms from around the country take on these cases, but for their two-person firm, representing one detainee is a full-time load.

Tennant's client is a 33-year-old Algerian man who was picked up as part of a bounty sweep while he was working in Pakistan.

"The house he was staying in was raided and he was held in Pakistan for 11 days. He was told by his cellmate, who spoke a little English, that the Pakistani's were saying they had nothing on him. Instead, he was turned over to the Americans, taken to Afghanistan and tied to the bottom of an airplane and taken to Guantanamo Bay, where he has been for six years," Tennant said.

Tennant will make her fourth trip to Guantanamo Bay in mid-March to meet with her client. They are working toward getting him a trial and also determining where he will go once he is released.

"The detainees were labeled the 'worst of the worst' by (former Secretary of Defense) Donald Rumsfeld. There were originally 800 detainees, but now there are 275. A number of them have been sent back to their countries, many whose lives have probably been ruined by this experience. They are probably free, but dealing with the aftermath, extreme abuse and torture," Tennant said. "Our client can't go back to Algeria because he's been labeled an enemy combatant and he could be subjected to many years in prison. Right now, we don't know where he would go."

Tennant has visited Guantanamo Bay and describes it as a fortress. She said there are a number of check points and doors to pass through before coming to a small room where they meet with their client, who is shackled to the floor.

All of the Guantanamo Bay detainees are being held in solitary confinement. Tennant said they get an exercise period in a pen at some time during the day. At that point, the prisoner can yell over the pen wall to the other prisoners next to him. They can yell back and forth from their cells. She said the only contact they have is with the gloved hand that puts food through the slot in their door, or the one that leads them to exercise period.

"Our client said his faith is sustaining him," Tennant said. He has no contact with his family so Tennant, who is in touch with his mother, writes him with news from home. The letters, like the lawyer meeting transcripts, must be translated and reviewed, a process that can take three to four weeks.

"To the extent that we are in touch with his family, we hear their gratitude. We believe that they at least know there is somebody in the United States that cares what happens to him," Tennant said. "He had never met an American until he was arrested. The only Americans he had seen were in movies. He had only thought of the United States as a place where freedom was normal. When he came to Guantanamo, he began to see something was wrong. As time has gone on, it's hard for me to believe that he can think there is much hope of getting out."

Tennant said the men can be held indefinitely without an hope of release or ability to challenge their detention until the global war on terror has concluded.

"There have been people who have said we should be tried for treason for supporting terrorists, but they are forgetting the basic principle of innocent until proven guilty. Certainly, no one should be held for six years without a trial in the conditions in which he is being held," Tennant said, adding they receive more support than opposition. "I want people to know how our money is being spent and how we are treating people and the effect that it is almost certainly having on other countries and how our own soldiers might one day be treated."

The Global Security Forum is sponsored by the Department of Political Science; Philosophy; History; Rhetoric, Communications and Journalism; Sociology and Anthropology and the Center for International Programs, Phi Sigma Alpha and the Center for Student Activities.

SUMMARY

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