

My name is Ronald Aubourg. My first trip was February, 1992. We were about to file a lawsuit to free the refugees. It was my capacity as an interpreter to advise about cultural issues, assisting the legal team which argued the case to close Guantanamo and subsequently I traveled six/seven times through September 1994, the same month that President Aristide went back.

The condition really pains me what the US government was doing to people who were fleeing because of their political leanings. They were being chased by attack dogs. It was hurricane season and they were left out there. Ferocious wind. And then there were ripped cots. The babies did not have cribs and stuff like that. As a matter of fact, later on when we asked, they gave us cardboard for the babies. I looked at the canned food they were given, expired food. People were getting sick and, you know, the hot sun. The conditions were really horrendous in terms of how a human being should live.

They were organizers before and they were fighting for democracy and it is because of organization that is why they ended up in Guantanamo because the military was chasing them because they were being beaten, their wives or children were being raped. They brought that skill with them in organizing the camp. They had a camp president, they had lieutenants, they had people who could come up with slogans. A few were militant, like, "hey, listen. I shouldn't be treated that way. I have my rights too as a human being."

The hunger strike came about where, "hey, by any means necessary we are going to convey a message. We are going to defend ourselves. We are going to advocate for ourselves." It was very, very strict. They were well organized and guess what? It got the attention of the world. The public pressure swayed public opinion about what was going on down in Guantanamo. One of the last protests... It was pouring rain! They were swearing at Kinder. Kinder is the commander, you know, calling him names, you know, bad names.

In a foreign land and these people were incarcerated behind barbed wire and they had the courage to organize this protest. Before Kinder came, if it rained, they have to find a corner to stay. Before Kinder came, kids, they were not given cribs and at that point they were giving cribs. Before Kinder came it was a favor for them to go the exchange and buy stuff: clothes and what have you. Before Kinder came there was not any soccer. There were not any schools. They were not allowed any recreational activities. That came about when Kinder came. So it was really, [sighs] finally, I can do this, I can do that. But still this is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal was to get out. But definitely an attitude change. The animosity towards military personnel changed.

So you know, you have a family, kids go to school and then they even had school for the adults. They were part of a community rather than part of a prison so this protest was part of the freedom they were allowed.

There was the formation of Camp Buckley, the HIV camp. That camp grew to more than 300 people. It was like, are they going to be held indefinitely? So from that came litigation which ultimately came down with an order to close the camp.

When I heard this through the news, I said, "Not again." Cubans are out, Haitians are out. This thing is only for military purposes. It was closed. I was shocked. I thought it was closed.

The message was pretty simple: these people are coming from a brutal situation. The trauma continues and if, in fact, you really want to help these people, Guantanamo is not the place for them. It is not like they are going to have clean running water. It is not like they are going to have sanitary conditions. No. I think there is a lesson to be learned that the space is not habilitated for human beings. We should not minimize the impact that it has on the people and it will last until they depart from the face of this earth.