



110 West Third Street, 204
New York, New York 10012
Telephone: (1-212) 998-6714
Website: www.chrgj.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 17, 2007

Contact: Meg Satterthwaite 212-998-6657 or 347-277-5035
Jayne Huckerby 212-992-8903 or 212-203-6410

CHRGJ Releases Unprecedented Testimony about CIA “Black Sites”
Declaration by Former Detainee Provides Graphic Details of Abuse

(New York—December 17, 2007) In the first-ever report of its kind, the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ) at New York University School of Law today released a comprehensive, first-hand account of a survivor of enforced disappearance and torture at several CIA “black sites.” The 63-page report *Surviving the Darkness: Testimony from the U.S. “Black Sites”* is the first to present an in-depth account of a former CIA detainee’s experience in his own words.

Surviving the Darkness is the narrative of Mohamed Farag Ahmad Bashmilah, a Yemeni national who spent more than a year and a half in the CIA’s secret detention program. Bashmilah was illegally detained by the Jordanian intelligence service in October 2003, tortured into signing a false confession, and then handed over to an American rendition team. He spent the next eighteen months in the U.S. secret detention network—in sites believed to be in Afghanistan and possibly eastern Europe. On May 5, 2005, he was transferred to the custody of the government of Yemen, where he was held in proxy detention at the behest of the U.S. government until he was put on trial and finally released in March 2006.

During his detention, Bashmilah experienced such severe trauma that he attempted suicide on three separate occasions and—in an effort to protest his unlawful detention—went on a hunger strike. He was never charged with a crime, never allowed any contact with members of his family, and never saw a lawyer or representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

“Being imprisoned in this way was almost worse than death itself—I felt I had been buried alive,” said Bashmilah in a telephone conversation with CHRGJ staff on the eve of the report’s release. “The prolonged isolation and extreme torture I experienced left deep emotional and physical scars that will never heal. It torments me to know that other innocent people are still out there suffering this injustice today.”

Surviving the Darkness was prepared by CHRGJ staff and student members of NYU School of Law’s International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC). On August 1, 2007, the Clinic joined the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in a lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California against Jeppesen Dataplan, Inc—a subsidiary of the Boeing Corporation. The lawsuit alleges that Jeppesen provided flight services enabling the transfer of Bashmilah and four other victims to secret CIA detention centers around the world. Under the direction of CHRGJ Faculty Director, Professor Meg Satterthwaite, and Research Director, Jayne Huckerby, Clinic students compiled the testimony through extensive interviews with Bashmilah.

On October 19, 2007, the U.S. government filed motions to intervene and dismiss the action or, in the alternative, for summary judgment on the basis that the case concerns state secrets. On December 14, 2007, Bashmilah’s account—alongside the accounts of other plaintiffs in the suit—was filed by the ACLU in support of the plaintiffs’ opposition to the government’s motion.

Along with the harrowing details of his mental and physical suffering, the report—which is a condensed version of the full legal filing—contains excerpts from more than 100 pages of documents substantiating the U.S. government’s role in torturing and illegally detaining Bashmilah, including diagrams drawn from memory of the cells and facilities in which he was kept. Bashmilah also describes the secret detention sites as newly-constructed and sophisticated—including constant surveillance and video cameras in cells and interrogation rooms—and details his many encounters with American interrogators, doctors, and psychiatrists.

“This report reveals the devastating human toll of the unlawful U.S. rendition and secret detention program,” said Professor Satterthwaite. “Contrary to the government’s assertions that only the so-called ‘worst-of-the-worst’ are subject to this level of mistreatment, Bashmilah’s experience shows the alarming reach of this policy, which is characterized by the deliberate infliction of extreme psychological and physical harm.”

To read the report, see: [*Surviving the Darkness: Testimony from the U.S. "Black Sites"*](#)

For documents related to the lawsuit, please go to: <http://www.aclu.org/safefree/torture/31165prs20070801.html>

For more information about our work, please visit the Center’s website at: www.chrgj.org

About the CHRGJ

The Center for Human Rights and Global Justice was established in 2002 to stimulate cutting edge scholarship and to make original and constructive contributions to on-going policy debates in the field of human rights. By emphasizing interdisciplinary analyses, the Center’s programs seek to situate international human rights law in the broader context of the political, jurisprudential, economic, sociological, historical, anthropological and other influences that shape it and determine its impact. The Center’s reports and legal memoranda on extraordinary rendition, disappearances, and detainee abuse have been cited in the Council of Europe’s major report on secret flights and prisons in Europe, distributed to members of the U.K. Parliament, and used by numerous non-governmental organizations.

Philip Alston is the Center’s Faculty Chair; Smita Narula and Margaret Satterthwaite are its Faculty Directors; Jayne Huckerby is Research Director; and Veerle Opghaffen is Program Director.

About the International Human Rights Clinic

The International Human Rights Clinic at NYU School of Law provides high-quality, professional human rights lawyering services to individual clients and non-governmental and intergovernmental human rights organizations, partnering with groups based in the United States and abroad. Working as legal advisers, counsel, co-counsel, or advocacy partners, clinic students work side-by-side with human rights activists from around the world. The Clinic is co-directed by Professor Smita Narula and Professor Margaret Satterthwaite of the NYU faculty; Amna Akbar is Clinical Fellow.

IHRC students Reena Arora, Lama Fakih, Michael Price, and Brenda Punsky made extensive contributions to producing the report.

#