

[03.20.18]

Bisher Al-Rawi: Well, I mean starting the bike for the first time was really something, you push a button [makes noise] and you hear it start, and it really is beautiful. And you feel the engine running inside of you.

ACLU: I might have to ask a couple of questions over because I just noticed a technical glitch that I just fixed. Is that OK?

Bisher Al-Rawi: No problem. Don't worry about it.

ACLU: When you talked about that feeling running through you in the bike. Can you relate that to being released from Guantanamo? Was there a release of emotion?

Bisher Al-Rawi: Repeat the question, please.

ACLU: How would you describe comparing your feelings on the bike and being released from Guantanamo?

[04.00.23]

Bisher Al-Rawi: Ah, well, being released from Guantanamo is the first step to freedom. I think once you start tasting life, and for me once I got on a bike, I really felt free. It's not like you walking on the street, you feel constrained. But once I got on my bike and I started it, I really felt something definite. I felt I am free.

ACLU: Often when a 20-year-old gets on a bike he speaks of freedom because he's 20. Was it a different kind of freedom for you the second time around?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I think once I got on the bike after my release, I could tell myself like this is real. Really I am free. I could do what I want to do. I mean before I didn't quite feel light.

[05.00.12]

But when I got on my bike, really, I felt like I'm almost back to my old self.

ACLU: What was it while in Guantanamo during the dark days that you dreamed about the bike, how was that helpful?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I mean, thinking about the bikes, talking about bikes, discussing bikes, I once asked my interrogator. I said, if you want me to

cooperate with you, get me a motorbike in my cell. He didn't. But really it's something that keeps you alive, it keeps you going.

ACLU: Just to repeat, when you were 20, just tell us about how old you were and you came about to get your first bike and why.

Bisher Al-Rawi: My first bike I got when I was 20, I was around 20, it was in 1987. Let's go through it again. I got my first bike in 1987. I was 20. And that was the first taste of this bug. And from there on I kept on riding, until Guantanamo, that is.

[06.02.02]

ACLU: When you were first detained, did you think about not riding about your bike? Did that weigh on you at all?

Bisher Al-Rawi: Well, actually, there's a story behind this which the British media definitely know. But I don't know if you guys know. But when things were really tough. We were in Bagram. Things were really, really horrible. But my insurance policy was coming towards the end of its time, and I have a five-year, maximum no-claim bonus, and I was really worried that I'm going to lose my no-claim bonus. So when I had the meeting with the Red Cross in Bagram, I said, and they said would you like a free phone, a letter, and I said, 'Yes, I do.' And I started writing, you know, Mom, this, that, and I said, 'Could I write about my insurance policy?' They said, 'Yes. You can.' And I said, 'Mom, could you please renew my insurance policy so I don't lose my no-claim bonus?' And I came out and actually I still did have my no-claim bonus. [laughs]

[07.01.16]

ACLU: Quite a testament to the human spirit that you, while in Guantanamo, you had the hope that I want to renew the insurance policy on my bike.

Bisher Al-Rawi: I mean, I did have hope. Initially, I haven't done everything, really. I hoped that all of this would pass by quickly. And I can't say I lost hope but for a long time after the initial period, I did lose hope. And you know I tried to keep on going, and thinking about my bike helped me.

ACLU: And then finally, you had mentioned that riding a bike is a universal thing. People from all cultures and countries who ride bikes share the same passions. Would you describe that?

Bisher Al-Rawi: Well, the emotions you get. In everything in life you have emotions. And when riding a bike you have special emotions. You

have a special bond with your machine. And you don't really think about it as a machine.

[08.00.02] You think that it feels you and you feel it. And I think that's universal among all riders.

ACLU: So riders who watch this video, they'll get you.

Bisher Al-Rawi: I hope they will. I think that all would agree that riding a bike is something you can't get anywhere else.

ACLU: And then could we try that last line, just trying to incorporate my question, the concept that any rider who watches this video would understand what I'm talking about.

Bisher Al-Rawi: Any rider watching this video would definitely understand that being on a bike is like nothing else. [walks off camera]

What time on Saturday?

ACLU:

[00:09.11]

Bisher Al-Rawi: My name is Bisher Al-Rawi. I reside in London, the UK, and I give the ACLU permission to use this footage.

ACLU: So I was to wanting to first start by asking you about some of your happiest early memories, but I think we've already covered that. So ...

Bisher Al-Rawi: Do you want me to look at you?

ACLU: Yeah. Look at me. So again the same thing. I'm not going to be seen in the interview so when I ask you a question, you shouldn't just say "yes," and if we don't get it, you know, we'll ask you to do it again. So in addition to being a lover of bikes, what else were your interests. Pre-Guantanamo Bay, what were your hopes and dreams? What did you think your life would be like?

Bisher Al-Rawi: Well, before Guantanamo I had many interests.
[01.00.00] I love also sports, exciting sort of sports, skydiving, sea-diving, all sorts of exciting sports. I cycle as well. So quite a lot of things I used to do.

- ACLU:* What did you think your life might be like when you were this age? Pre-Guantanamo, pre-Bagram?
- Bisher Al-Rawi:* Really, my dreams were to have a yacht and be sailing somewhere. I'm not there yet, but I'm hoping I'll be there soon.
- ACLU:* I believe your from Iraq and I don't know exactly how old you were when you came here. But what do you remember about Iraq, why you came here, and what did you think of the UK when you first came here?
- Bisher Al-Rawi:* My family sent me from Iraq to the UK in 1984, after the Iraq-Iran war and really Iraq wasn't a very safe place for us; that was the feeling of my family.
[20.00.00] So I came here to the UK, and all my family left Iraq and came to the UK. And UK was a very, very nice place to start life. Most of my memories are in the UK. I left Iraq at 16, so I have very few memories of Iraq.
- ACLU:* I think we covered that sort of background, so in the interest of time we can move on...try to get everything in.
- Bisher Al-Rawi:* Yeah, let's move on.
- ACLU:* So this is a sensitive question. Some people don't want to answer. But you were picked up [taken to?] in Gambia. When people watch this video they'll want to know why you were there. What were you doing in that part of the world?
- Bisher Al-Rawi:* My brother had an idea of processing peanuts, extracting oil from peanuts. And Gambia, where I was taken—kidnapped—is a country where they grow peanuts. And my brother wanted to set up a mobile factory whereby he actually goes to the farmers and process the peanuts on a mobile factory. And I have reasonably good engineering background and as well work with machinery and that sort of thing and my brother wants me to go with him to help set up that factory. And we traveled to Gambia and there the trouble started. And actually my brother had sort of shipped all the equipment, machinery, trucks and all of that to Gambia and he had put a lot of money into that project.
[03.00.00]
- ACLU:* Can you describe the circumstance when you were first arrested or captured?
- Bisher Al-Rawi:* Well, I have to say myself I wasn't arrested. I wasn't told I am under arrest. At the airport myself and the guys who were with me

were told there's a small problem that needs to be resolved, just a small problem, just a small problem.
[4.00.00] And unfortunately it was all deception and lies. And that small problem ended up years of my life in Guantanamo and what happened there.

ACLU: When was the first interaction with U.S. forces?

Bisher Al-Rawi: Well, my first interaction with U.S.—let's say personnel—I believe they were CIA. And that was the second day after our kidnap by the Gambian intelligence agency. And I like to use the word kidnap because really there was official to what they were doing. They were doing everything in the dark. Everything out of sight. And I like to think if a legitimate government, if a legitimate security force wants to do something, it will do it out in the open and in a candid and truthful way. And that wasn't the case with us.

ACLU:
[05.00.00] So what happened when you were in Gambia, and then eventually you went to the dark prison, and then to Bagram.

Bisher Al-Rawi: We first were stopped in Gambia, apprehended, and we had to spend about one month there. Myself and my good friend Jameel, we were then put on a flight to the dark prison. My brother and his friend, they were both British citizens, they were released and they went back to the UK.

ACLU: And why do you think it is that your brother, they allowed him to go back, but you

Bisher Al-Rawi: Well, I think that unfortunately in situations like this, it's a very complicated situation in terms of going through all the details, but unfortunately just works according to the color passport you have. Now myself and Jameel, we did not have the right color passport. Hence we were shifted to Afghanistan to the dark prison there.
[06.00.00] And my brother and his friend they had absolutely the right color—it was a red British passport and they were sent back to the UK.

ACLU: I've seen some earlier interviews and you describe how they physically dealt with you. I think you likened it to sacks of potatoes or something like that. Can you talk about how they treated you physically?

Bisher Al-Rawi: Well, physically we were treated I think you have to imagine yourself as a lump of something, as a lump of worthless

something, I have to say. And that's how, let's say some kids playing with a lump of something, that's how we were treated—thrown here and there carelessly. You don't know whether your head is going to hit the wall or the floor or something. You don't know what's going to happen to you.

ACLU:
[07.00.00]

So I'm sure each place you were detained was different but can you describe the physical surroundings of each place where you were?

Bisher Al-Rawi:

Well, each place was different, and I think the better phrase would be that each place was worse in many, many ways. I think it's the common factor that you're going from bad to worse in my situation. Things were always sort of on a down slope. That's of course until my release. But the dark prison was I think a very very horrid horrid place. It's pitch dark. You can't see anything. You're on the floor. You need to use the toilet. You can't see how, you don't know what to do, it's very very difficult circumstance, especially the dark prison.

ACLU:

And then when you went to Bagram, what did it look like there physically. Some people—I think Omar described it like a concentration camp-like atmosphere. What did you find?

Bisher Al-Rawi:
[08.00.00]

Well, again coming from the dark prison, Bagram was a slightly better place, i.e., you can see people at least. You can see human beings, which is a big improvement from being held with just insects and rats. So there was a slight relief that we could see people, we could interact with other individuals, with the prisoners, or guards. But after that initial relief, I think, a huge disappointment fell upon me. You're being oppressed, you could hear people screaming, people shouting, other prisoners being tortured one way or another. It's all like very artificial bad place.

ACLU:
[09.00.00]

And [*inaudible in background*] so Guantanamo, so then you were in Bagram which was also bad, and then in Guantanamo I think you spent a long time in solitary confinement there.

Bisher Al-Rawi:

From Bagram going to Guantanamo, the flight alone was a nightmare. I think really really the flight for myself and I think everybody the others is part of our own memories that will always be there, just remembering how we were cuffed blindfolded for the long duration of the flight was really really something. When we got to Guantanamo, we were straight away put into solitary

confinement, and for me that was about three or so months after I left home in London.

[10.00.00] And to be in a steel structure, a steel cell... Let me start again. For me being in a steel structure just coming from London in a very dimly lit place was really like, to say it's depressing, to say it's demoralizing, to say that one has lost hope is all true. Solitary confinement in Guantanamo—really it's a place where people lose their minds.

ACLU: What did you think about in those times? What helped you get through those moments?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I'm like everybody else. I went through periods from the first day I worked very very hard—

[11.00.00] to preserve myself, my physical and mental well being. And when things were really really bad, when I could see no hope, I would sort of go in dreamland, imagine myself riding my bike or being on a beautiful boat sailing somewhere, and I would just drift away from the sad reality I was in into that dream world I created for myself. Until somebody comes and bangs on the door and wakes me up from that.

ACLU: So the person who might have been banging on the door might have been a guard or an interrogator. Can you tell me a little about your interactions with the people when you were detained?

Bisher Al-Rawi: Generally my interaction with everybody was, you know, based on, initially was based on mutual respect.

[12.00.00] But with time I saw that that respect was just coming from my side. And it was not coming from the other side whether it was the guards or other officials. And I used to always give the excuse that, you know, they need time to understand, and that they need time to sort things out, they need time, they need time. And I used to talk a lot with officials in Guantanamo. But after years passing, I thought to myself, no Bisha, they don't need time. That's simply the way they want to treat you.

ACLU: And how did you deal with that? How did you...

Bisher Al-Rawi: I mean, coming to the realization that, you know, treating us in a very bad way is the norm and that's what they are there to do, you know, I sort of, you know, closed my mental doors and physical doors to the guards and to the interrogators, and I decided one day that I would not interact with them until they improved the treatment, until they treated us fairly.

[13.00.00] And I told that to my interrogators. And until the day I left, that was my stand.

ACLU: I think when people sometimes think of torture and abuse, they think of the very worst things—waterboarding, but for those of us who know the stuff, it's not that kind of blatant abuse. There were a lot of other things going on, the sleep deprivation, the sensory, temperature. all those kinds of abuse. Were you ever subject those and can you talk about that and how it made you feel?

Bisher Al-Rawi: It's very interesting. We hear about third world countries and how they abuse their citizens. And they seem to use very heavy-handed way, and you always see blood and bruises. And when those people come to the West, they can always show bruises. They open their body and show bruises. Now the US authority they skip that part, and they actually reached a way of destroying people, of driving them mad, completely mad, losing their senses, without even touching them. Although they did use physical abuse, plenty of that, but the psychological part, for example, sleep deprivation—you can maybe keep control of yourself for one, two, maybe three days. But after that you're done, you're finished. And I think anybody watching this could try it. Don't sleep for one day, maybe you can. OK. Try it for two days. See how your mood will be. Try a program which the army would every one hour they will move the prisoner from one cell to another. That's a sort of way of sleep deprivation, you can't settle down, you can't sleep. And if that doesn't work, they'll do it every half hour. They keep moving you, the guards keep walking you around the camp. You don't go to sleep at all.

[14.00.00]

[15.00.00] That's one way, and I think that's a very, very effective way to destroy somebody, to let them lose hope, to let them lose their minds. And there are many, many other things they've done there.

ACLU: In one of the interviews you said that they could never take a picture of, for instance, with the temperature. If someone were to walk through Guantanamo, they would see that everything was normal, but maybe inside the cell someone was freezing cold.

Bisher Al-Rawi: I mean, sleep deprivation is one example. There are other examples that I could not believe that I was actually experiencing myself. I really could not believe. And one day after the tragic I say murder of three individuals in Guantanamo, three prisoners were killed in Guantanamo, after that I was in Camp Five and one day the temperature was really cold, very very cold, and we reported it to the guards and it got colder, and we talked more about it and it simply got colder. And everybody in Camp Five was shivering

cold. On top of that, they took all our blankets, anything extra we had to cover ourselves, and we were left on the bare mats. OK? And that wasn't for one day or for two days. It was for a couple of months. And that, you can't report that. And I till today I have pains in my joints and in my bones, and especially on my feet. OK? You know, walking on a cold floor or sleeping in the cold day after day day after day, I can't really describe to you how I felt, but you think you just close yourself onto yourself and you just sit down

[17.00.00]

and that's it. You just count the seconds to pass.

ACLU:

Did you ever have interactions with other detainees either in Bagram or in Guantanamo? What were the interactions with the other detainees like?

Bisher Al-Rawi:

I always had interactions with other detainees. I mean, in Bagram especially because I spoke English. Everybody wanted something. I was the guy to ask, and the guards would ask me to interpret. The funny thing was they even wanted me to interpret the languages I could not speak. And I could not see the sense of that but unfortunately, sense was not something you could project under these circumstances. You would like to explain to the guard that I do not speak that language, but no, you have to interpret. And then you end up using sign language and whatever. Although it was a very, one feels privileged to be able to help others.

[18.00.00]

But it is unfortunate that it is no sense or sense would not prevail under these circumstances. And in Bagram again there was also interaction with other prisoners. People would always need someone to interpret, to get some medical attention or help with something. And unfortunately because of this role, I could see the problems much more than anybody else. Because in one day maybe ten prisoners would ask me to speak with the corpsman, the medical person who comes to the blocks. And I saw myself day after day, week after week, and even month after month, I'm interpreting for the same person, for the same problem, and reporting one medical problem for months. And I say to the guy, hasn't it yet been resolved, and he would say, no Bisha it has not. And that's how it was in Guantanamo.

[19.00.00]

ACLU:

What...I don't know if you've thought about this, maybe you have. If you have, you can give an answer. What was for you the most difficult part of that whole period if you could say one thing?

Bisher Al-Rawi:

Everything was difficult in Guantanamo and Bagram, but I think one thing especially stands out in my mind, and that is when

another prisoner, when I hear another prisoner screaming, screaming out of pain. And he's right in front of me or right next to me, and he's screaming not because he's done anything wrong. No. He's simply in his cell. He's screaming because he's ill. He's screaming because the guard has just sprayed him with pepper spray without doing anything, or because the guard closed the bead hole, that opening, on his hands, and he slammed it so very hard that his fingers were caught. And he's screaming for that. And nobody cares.

[20.00.00] Nobody gives a damn. Nobody comes to help. And he's screaming and screaming. And next door you feel your heart is being torn. You can't do anything. He's your friend. And you can't do anything. And that just destroys you from inside.

ACLU: [inaudible] We'll move on to other areas. One thing we want people to very clearly understand so try to incorporate this into your answer is that you were detained for X number of years and you were never charged with a crime. And you were eventually released. Right? So can you tell me just a little bit about when you were imprisoned did you think about legal representation, did you think about notions of innocent until proven guilty, did you think that should apply to you.

Bisher Al-Rawi: The first two, three years of my capture, I always thought that soon enough they will realize that I am innocent
[21.00.00] and I'll be released. Soon enough that will happen. Soon enough that will happen. But that never did. And I always used to give then the benefit of the doubt. And I think that they just need a little of time to get over this. But unfortunately that never happened. And even the tribunal, whoever has access to that can look, that I spoke quite thoroughly during the tribunal, defended myself and say that really I haven't done anything, anything wrong. And I asked for witnesses and so on and so forth. But unfortunately nothing came of that. So very quickly I lost hope of being innocent until proven guilty. And I realized that this is all a stupid, stupid game, and things may come to an end but it will take a long time, and it did take a long time.

ACLU: May want to repeat that more succinctly, innocent until proven guilty.

[22.00.00] [inaudible]

Bisher Al-Rawi: Just remind me what I said, please.

ACLU: I think you were saying that for along time you thought, something will happen, and then

Bisher Al-Rawi: For a very long time, for years in Guantanamo, I used to think that the notion that one is innocent until proven guilty will prevail, it will prevail, and they just need a little bit of time to understand, a little bit of time to solve this problem. But eventually I gave up hope. And I realized that this is simply a stupid game, and it will take a very long time to resolve. For me, it has taken four and a half years. And of course for many other prisoners the old years still goes on.

ACLU: When did you find out that you were actually going to be released? What was that like?

Bisher Al-Rawi: Knowing that you're going to be released is a thought I always kept at bay
[23.00.00] because officials and authorities they always played games with the prisoners. They raised their hopes they tell them they were going to be released, only for that to be dashed. And after that one is demoralized they used this against you. So for me, an incident that will take somebody to the aircraft and say, you're going to go home, and they will simply take him out of the aircraft and back to his cell. And to imagine this has happened to somebody. I mean, we have seen individuals this thing happening to them. And we can see how destructive it is on them, and it's not only destructive in the short term but in the long term on their stability, the stability of their mind. So I always told myself I would never fall for that. So even the last few days when it seemed imminent that I would be released,

[24.00.00] I always told myself Bisha, Bisha, this could be a game, so be on your guard. Don't fall for it like others.

ACLU: And when did it actually become real to you that I'm going home?

Bisher Al-Rawi: Once I was taken to the airport, and I could see the aircraft, the leased aircraft, and I could see the British personnel, and when those individual spoke with me, I got quite positive. And when I got on the aircraft and I could see everybody British there, well, almost everybody, I felt more relief. And when we landed in the UK, I thought, that's it. I'm home. I'm free.

ACLU: So four and a half years, and were you ever charged with a crime?

Bisher Al-Rawi: No, I was never charged with any crime. I was never even, no real accusations were put against me. You know, I was held for four and a half years interrogated hundreds of times and put on a flight and taken home.

[25.00.00] Really, it's ludicrous, but that's how it was.

ACLU: Now how long has it been?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I've been released now for over two years, two years and a few months. I was released around the 30th of March 2007. After my release, really one struggled after the release. You don't know where you are. You don't know the real world. You don't know how to function in the real world. But several months later, in November, I got married. I found the right lady for me. And we got married. Now we have a six-month-old baby boy who we love dearly, and I think life started to have a different feel to it.

ACLU:
[26.00.00] Were there particular people or groups that helped you in those difficult times when you were here but struggling with reintegrating? What was helpful to you in that process?

Bisher Al-Rawi: The good people who have helped me and many others are too many to mention today. First of all without them, I would not be here. For my release would not have been if it wasn't for the many, many good people who have helped and worked extremely hard for my release and other people's release. Now after the release there were charities, organizations, friends here in the UK. And especially who have helped, like Reprieve, for example, my lawyers, pierce, hugs, now they are no longer lawyers, they are no longer organizations and charities. They became friends and family,

[27.00.00] and when you speak with them, you speak like you're speaking with your best friend, and really for me that was a great help and that among the most important things that helped me to pull through this.

ACLU: And we understand that you actually work at Reprieve now, so maybe you want to talk a little bit about it.

Bisher Al-Rawi: Yes, since my release I was always involved with Reprieve, and when I was a bit depressed, I went there and get cheered up. So I was always involved. And it's a charity which I have to say is very close to heart and they do a difficult job, the most difficult job in the world, I think. And they're a great bunch of people. And fortunately enough I found myself a part-time job with them and I'm gonna start there, like officially start beginning of September.

ACLU:
[28.00.00] And what will you be going for them?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I'll do the same old job which I did in Bagram and in Guantanamo and that's interpreter.

ACLU: How have your friends and family reacted to your being home?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I think my main worry, my main concern was my mom. My mom, I'm happy to say that she loved me dearly and I love her dearly. And I think that my being away was the hardest on her. And of course on my sister and my brother and all the family. But my mom especially. And to say that she's extremely happy to see me is an understatement. And I miss her very much.

ACLU: Now what are you looking forward to in the future. What's different and what you are looking forward to?

Bisher Al-Rawi: If you are watching this program from the beginning, [29.00.00] you have already seen my motorbike, this is a brand new bike which I just got a couple of months ago, which I'm very happy with. And I think the other thing which I'm looking forward to and I'm trying to work try quite hard to achieve is to get my boat and sail away.

ACLU: Can you, because we might not show the motor bike first, so can you answer without referencing that?

Bisher Al-Rawi: Yeah.

ACLU: So what are you looking forward to now?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I'm looking forward to riding my bike, and I do a lot of that. And my other dream being on a boat. I'm working on getting that dream, making that dream come true, maybe even with my family alongside me.

ACLU: So we just want to ask you a few questions about acknowledgment, apology, accountability, and a little bit about the case that you're involved with. I'm curious to know what you thought about America before, maybe what you think of America now, and what good things you still see in America, if any. [30.00.00]

Bisher Al-Rawi: President Bush after 9/11 went on television and said those people in Guantanamo, they're terrorists. And I was watching this clip with my brother-in-law, and he said, "Liar!" And I said, "No he's not. He's the president of the United States. And I truly believed in my heart that those were in Guantanamo were terrorists. Now only a few months later I saw myself with them. I thought, Oh my God,

my brother-in-law was right. He's a liar. Now I have to say disappointment ran hand in hand with my experience. Disappointment in American justice, disappointment with maybe Americans in general. Although I actually have friends and family in US.

[31.00.00] My aunt, she's an American citizen there for many, many years. And I have many other friends and acquaintances. But there's a large cloud of disappointment. Nothing I saw in my experience was projected. You know, all of us we watch American movies, we have a large interaction with Hollywood, with the image that it has projected to all of us. And one had portrayed US to have a certain principles. Unfortunately, in this experience I saw most if not all these principles go way down. Now in spite of saying that I saw individuals in this dark period, I saw individuals—officials, soldiers, medical personnel—who stood out

[32.00.00] and were exceptional, really exceptional, and those I will always remember. And of course on top of that the many, many good people who are working towards justice. Now I saw some people in Guantanamo who I thought was exceptional. But they were few. But there were many, many other people working behind the scenes. And I think we owe a great deal of gratitude towards them, of course, ACLU included.

ACLU: Thank you. Now what would an apology from [the top?] mean to you?

Bisher Al-Rawi: An apology, I don't think that would happen. But if it was to come from the officials, a sincere apology, I think it would go a long, long, long way. I think that will mean a lot.

[33.00.00] To me it would mean a lot, and I'm very sure that to almost everybody it would mean a lot, alongside, of course, rectifying the injustice.

ACLU: So let's talk about that a little bit. One of the cases of *Mohamed et al. v. Jeppesen* I'm sure that even though you don't want to know too much about it, you know that till now many different courts have said that we cannot even discuss this case in court because it's a secret, it's a state secret. So that means that effectively they have silenced you and the four other men who are part of this case. And creating a roadblock between you getting some kind of recognition or compensation for what you went through. So how does that make you feel?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I feel the notion of states secrets relating to our cases is a big lie for many, many reasons. The first reason is that

[34.00.00] the way we gonna defend ourselves is the same way we defended ourselves in the tribunals. And that is available, it's public knowledge. So really our cases, what has happened to us, and the U.S. involvement in our cases, is all in the public domain. So for them to claim that it is a state secret, that our cases can't go to court, I think that's simply lying to the American people, and deceiving them to believing that there's something when there isn't anything.

ACLU: Do you think that anyone in the United States should be held criminally liable for what's happened to you and for what's happened to the others?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I think the day will come, and I think that's a long way away, by the way, but the day will come when individuals will be held responsible.

[35.00.00] Now I don't know whether the US itself will be able to rise to that challenge, or maybe other countries would force the US to rise to that challenge. But I hope the day will come, but I think we're a long way away. I think the US hasn't yet realized the gravity of the injustices it has incurred.

ACLU: I'm sure one of the things that probably motivates you to do interviews like this to work with Reprieve, and something we've heard from the others, is thinking about those who are still there. What do you think will happen, including those who may have some criminal charges against them? What do you think will happen to them, what do you think should happen to them?

Bisher Al-Rawi: The people back in Guantanamo who are still in Guantanamo, they're always on my mind and on the mind of almost everybody else. And whether they have done something or they haven't, all we have asked is for them to be treated fairly. If there are criminal charges, for those charges to be heard in court. Really. If the US thinks somebody is a criminal, that's fine. Take him to court and let him have his day in court. And really it's either you release people or give them justice, true justice, with no deception, no lies.

ACLU: Can you think of anything that could be done to really ensure or to guarantee that what you went through and what some of the others went through will not happen again?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I don't think there's anything I can say for what happened not to happen again. But I think the US claim to have certain principles, I think one should go through one's life to adhere to these principles. And one should adhere to one's principles not just in the good

[37.00.00] times, but especially, especially when the going gets tough. When it's really difficult, when it's really, really difficult, that's when you should adhere most to your principles. And I think if the US claims certain principles, it should adhere to its principles through good and bad.

ACLU: Are there any principles that come to mind?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I think what has happened to us in terms of whether it is torture or whether it is imprisonment without due judicial review, or through being held incommunicado without access to your family or friends or lawyers, all of these, and I think the trespasses of the US authorities toward those in Guantanamo and the thousands and thousands of other prisoners around the world which the US is holding or has held, with US knowledge and approval, [38.00.00] I think the trespasses are too many to talk about today, but all of these go against US principles and what the US has stood for from the start of US history, so I think there's plenty to be rectified.

ACLU: 7:28. And a couple for continuity. *[inaudible]* Both outside and in here today you talked about riding a bike and sailing. So there seem to be some themes, some motifs, about out in the ocean, out riding on the road. What does that say about your personality?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I think riding a bike and sailing, I think they're most the beautiful thing in life. Not really sure what this says about my personality in terms of what I like. But I think the best thing on land is a motorbike and the best thing on sea is a sailing boat.

ACLU: [39.00.00] Is there something about that forward momentum of it, a feeling, a symbolism there?

Bisher Al-Rawi: I think there is symbolism between freedom and being on a bike, or being in the open ocean on a beautiful boat. I think you sort of lose yourselves among the waves. You're living your dream. You're going places, you're going places where most people would not go.

ACLU: One last one. Omar had talked yesterday about comparing some of the concentration camps and Guantanamo. I wonder if you want to talk more.

Bisher Al-Rawi: Elaborate, please.

ACLU: From what you know about the Nazi camps.

- Bisher Al-Rawi:* I don't want to go down that track. I think they're different.
[40.00.00] Hence, I don't want to jump on every bandwagon, so to speak.
- ACLU:* But maybe, if you use it, it might be a device for an American audience to grasp. American audience knows what a concentration camp is. They've seen so much of it. They may not know....
- Bisher Al-Rawi:* OK, I'll say something about that. The twentieth century had many sad episodes. Concentration camps was definitely one of the biggest. I think the 21st century is going to have many sad episodes. I think Guantanamo is going to be among the saddest.
- ACLU:* I was just going to say, I want to stick to my promise, it's 7:31. I think we're done asking questions, but one question I just want to ask. I don't think we'd use it for footage,
[41.00.00] but one of the things is that we have this torture FOIA law suit, under the Freedom of Information Act. Through that law suit we have gotten tens of thousands of pages, including some of the legal memos authorizing these techniques. Now a part of this law suit also is to be the releasing of photographs depicting abuse, and I just wonder what you think about it. It's a very controversial issue.
- Bisher Al-Rawi:* When third world countries, when we want to say bad things about third world countries, we photos, we bring images, look what evil leaders have done to their people. And I think in the intent of the US I don't think it should be any different. We can talk about someone being tortured, we can talk about someone getting hurt, we can talk about people losing their lives, but when you show people that this is actually happening,
[42.00.00] when you have pictures or films I think that will bring it to home, I think much, much better than simple words. Although words can get to people's hearts but I think images will get to their hearts and minds as well.
- ACLU:* I have one last point. Is there any good that you see in America. I know from living in the Midwest of America that anyone who rides a bike in America is going to instantly relate to you, even though they never related to you before, they're going to see from that bike, oh my God, I know what that means. I'm just wondering is there any connection that you might feel with an American that also rides a bike.
- Bisher Al-Rawi:* Especially, or...? Take me through that again, please.

ACLU: What Joel's trying to say is for people who ride bikes it's a universal thing, so is there anything you want to say...Because the guys riding the bikes, they're pro-American, they're proud about the principles of America. And they may believe that we live up to the principles and don't understand that we didn't. And when they see you on a bike they may just listen to you now. They may dismiss you till they see, oh, you're like me.

Bisher Al-Rawi: The US is a great country. It's a great country whether we like it or not. Nobody can deny that. But being a great country one should always have a high moral stand. And I think whether you are on a bike or on your feet or on a sailing boat or wherever you are, you should adhere to high principles. And I think people of the US should make the government to adhere to high principles. The image that we have of the US we all have pictures of how the US should be, whether as a non-US citizen or yourselves as Americans, you should make your government be what you think it should be. It should behave as you think it should, not in a secretive way behind closed doors, not like that.

[44.00.00]

ACLU: And the last thing we want—is there anything else that you want to say. We hope many people will see this. What do you want people to know about you?

Bisher Al-Rawi: About me? I think all I want you to know about me is what you have heard already. But I want you to know that there are many, many good people around. Many, many good people who are doing very, very hard work, charities, organizations, whether its Amnesty International, whether it's Reprieve, or whether ACLU, or many, the Center of Constitutional Rights, many, many organizations doing tremendous work, and all these organizations must be supported by the people, must be.

[45.00.00]

ACLU: We're just going to get a quiet shot.

[End of Audio]