

100-day campaign will remind Obama of pledge to close Guantanamo

WASHINGTON - Closure of the military prison at the U.S. Army base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, will be getting renewed attention during a 100-day campaign designed to hold President-elect Barack Obama to his campaign pledge to close the compound.

On Jan. 11, the seventh anniversary of its opening, organizers of the 100 Days Campaign will begin a series of events including public witness, street theater, processions, lectures, prayer and fasting to call attention to Obama's promise that he would close the controversial prison. A Department of Defense spokesman said 250 detainees remain behind bars there.

"We want to support Obama in following through on his commitment," campaign organizer Frida Berrigan told Catholic News Service. "We think he wants to do the right thing. He's going to need our support and we want to keep it visible so it's not forgotten."

The concern, she explained, is that closing the prison may be overlooked as the new administration addresses pressing issues such as the economy, home foreclosures, rising unemployment and the war in Iraq.

Matt Daloisio, another campaign organizer and a member of the New York Catholic Worker, said events will begin at 12:45 p.m., Jan. 11 at Dupont Circle in Washington with a symbolic prisoner procession. Many in the procession will be wearing orange jumpsuits similar to the ones the detainees wear and some will be hooded, Daloisio said.

At the close of the program, about 40 people are expected to join a nine-day, liquid-only fast, he said.

The fast will be broken on the morning of Jan. 20, Inauguration Day, at McPherson Square, just blocks from the White House. Public vigils will be held 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

weekdays through April 30 at sites yet to be determined. Other events are planned every Monday and Wednesday evening at Washington churches and law schools.

On Tuesdays, participants also plan to visit members of Congress to urge the closing of the Guantanamo prison. On Thursdays, “creative actions” will take place at various locations, according to Mr. Daloisio.

“For seven years people have been sitting in Guantanamo with no charge against them and no chance to come to court,” he told CNS. “Finally we have some semblance of justice for these men and we don’t want to miss the opportunity to see that this (release) happens.”

The campaign was initiated by Witness Against Torture, primarily a group of Catholics Workers who in 2005 began to call attention to the situation at the Guantanamo prison and to the harsh interrogation tactics of detainees. Joining the effort are Pax Christi USA, School of the Americas Watch, September 11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International and several peace and human rights organizations.

Details of the 100 Days Campaign can be found online at www.100dayscampaign.org.