

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

CENTER FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES)
2130 H Street, N.W., S. 701)
Washington, D.C. 20037)
)
AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION)
125 Broad Street)
New York, N.Y. 10004)
)
ELECTRONIC PRIVACY INFORMATION CENTER) Civil Action No.
1718 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.)
Suite 200)
Washington, D.C. 20009)
)
AMERICAN-ARAB ANTI-DISCRIMINATION)
COMMITTEE)
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 PEOPLE FOR THE AMERICAN WAY FOUNDATION)
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 REPORTERS COMMITTEE FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS)
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 Arlington, VA 22209)
)
 WORLD ORGANIZATION AGAINST TORTURE USA)
 1725 K Street, NW, Suite 610)
 Washington, D.C. 20006)
)
 Plaintiffs,)
)
 v.)
)
 DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE)
 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.)
 Washington DC 20530,)
)
 Defendant.)
)

COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE RELIEF

1. This is an action under the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), 5 U.S.C. § 552, the First Amendment and the common law, for injunctive and other appropriate relief, and seeking the expedited processing and immediate release of agency records requested by plaintiffs from defendant Department of Justice ("DOJ") and DOJ's component Immigration and Naturalization Service ("INS").

2. This Freedom of Information Act case seeks the immediate disclosure of government documents concerning more than 1,000 individuals who have been arrested and detained in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks. This lawsuit does not question the importance of the government's investigation. But the manner in which the government is conducting its investigation also raises issues of the utmost public importance. One of the core purposes of the FOIA is to assure that the government cannot shield its actions from scrutiny by withholding information that is traditionally available to the public. Yet, that is precisely what has occurred here. The government candidly acknowledges that hundreds of people remain in federal custody but refuses to disclose, among other basic facts, who these detainees are and where they are being held. This secrecy is unprecedented and deprives the public of information it is lawfully entitled to receive. In recent days, the government has publicly disclosed some fragmentary and incomplete information about some of the detainees in response to requests from Members of Congress. Thus far, however, the government has either

ignored or rejected plaintiffs' FOIA requests, which were filed more than a month ago.

Jurisdiction and Venue

3. This Court has both subject matter jurisdiction over this action and personal jurisdiction over the parties pursuant to 5 U.S.C. §§ 552(a)(4)(B) and 552(a)(6)(E)(iii). This court also has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and supplemental jurisdiction over plaintiffs' common law claim under 28 U.S.C. § 1367. Venue lies in this district under 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B).

Parties

4. Plaintiff Center for National Security Studies has worked to protect civil liberties and human rights for more than 25 years.

5. Plaintiff American Civil Liberties Union is a nationwide, non-profit membership organization with approximately 300,000 members that, since its founding in 1920, has been dedicated to protecting the civil liberties and civil rights of all Americans, both immigrant and native-born.

6. Plaintiff Electronic Privacy Information Center is a non-profit, public interest research center established in 1994 to focus public attention on emerging civil liberties issues and to promote constitutional values.

7. Plaintiff American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee is a non-partisan, non-sectarian civil rights organization dedicated to protecting rights of Arab-Americans and promoting cultural heritage.

8. Plaintiff American Immigration Law Foundation was established in 1987 as a tax-exempt, not-for-profit educational and service organization. The Foundation's mission is to promote understanding among the general public of immigration law and policy, through education, policy analysis, and support to litigators.

9. Plaintiff American Immigration Lawyers Association is a voluntary bar association of 7500 immigration lawyers and law professors.

10. Plaintiff Amnesty International USA is the U.S. Section of Amnesty International, a grassroots activist organization with over one million members worldwide. Amnesty International is dedicated to freeing prisoners of conscience, gaining fair trials for political prisoners, ending torture, political killings and "disappearances," and abolishing the death penalty throughout the world.

11. Plaintiff Arab-American Institute is a tax-exempt public affairs, ethnic citizenship development organization dedicated to the political empowerment of Arab Americans.

12. Plaintiff Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, is a non-profit civil liberties organization defending civil rights of Asian Americans nationwide.

13. Plaintiff Center for Constitutional Rights is a non-profit legal and educational organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

14. Plaintiff Center for Democracy and Technology works to promote democratic values and constitutional liberties in the digital age.

15. Plaintiff Council on American Islamic Relations is a non-profit, grassroots membership organization established to promote a positive image of Islam and Muslims in America.

16. Plaintiff First Amendment Foundation is a constitutional rights organization whose purpose is to educate the public about the fluid nature of First Amendment rights and to maintain these rights.

17. Plaintiff Human Rights Watch is dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world.

18. Plaintiff The Multiracial Activist is a libertarian oriented activist journal covering social and civil liberties issues of interest to individuals who perceive themselves to be "biracial" or "multiracial," "interracial" couples/families and "transracial" adoptees.

19. Plaintiff The Nation magazine is a weekly magazine published by The Nation Company.

20. Plaintiff People For the American Way Foundation is a constitutional liberties organization.

21. Plaintiff Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press was created in 1970 at a time when the nation's news media faced a wave of government subpoenas asking reporters to name confidential sources.

22. Plaintiff World Organization Against Torture USA is a non-profit human rights monitoring, reporting and advocacy group,

and a U.S. affiliate of the international World Organization Against Torture, a worldwide network of over 200 human rights organizations.

23. Defendant DOJ is a Department of the Executive Branch of the United States Government, and includes component entities including the INS. DOJ is an agency within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 552(f).

The Post-September 11 Detentions

24. In the wake of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, Attorney General Ashcroft, FBI Director Mueller, and other officials issued a series of statements indicating that individuals had been "arrested" or "detained" as a result of investigative activities relating to the attacks. On October 25, the Attorney General announced that, "[t]o date, our anti-terrorism offensive has arrested or detained nearly 1,000 individuals as part of the September 11 terrorism investigation."

Plaintiffs' FOIA Requests and Requests for Expedited Processing

25. By two separate letters, plaintiffs on October 29, 2001, delivered to defendant DOJ and the INS requests under the FOIA seeking the disclosure of agency records "concerning the individuals 'arrested or detained' in the words of Attorney General Ashcroft." Specifically, plaintiffs requested disclosure of the following information:

a) the identities of each such individual, where they are being held, the circumstances of their detention or arrest, and any charges brought against them;

b) the identity of any lawyers representing any of these individuals;

c) the identities of any courts, which have been requested to enter orders sealing any proceedings in connection with any of these individuals, any such orders which have been entered, and the legal authorities that the government has relied upon in seeking any such secrecy orders; and

d) all policy directives or guidance issued to officials about making public statements or disclosures about these individuals or about the sealing of judicial or immigration proceedings.

26. In their letters to defendant DOJ and the INS of October 29, 2001, plaintiffs stated that their FOIA requests met the criteria for expedited processing under defendant DOJ's regulations:

The "information is urgently needed to inform the public concerning some actual or alleged government activity;" the requesting organizations are primarily engaged in disseminating information to the public; the subject of the detainees "is of widespread and exceptional media interest and the information sought involves possible questions about the government's integrity which affect public confidence," and the information is needed immediately to prevent "the loss of substantial due process rights" to individuals and "threats to their physical safety."

27. Plaintiffs summed up their entitlement to expedited disclosure by noting that "this request is about federal government activity, it concerns a matter of current exigency to the American public, and the consequences of delaying a response would be to compromise a significant recognized interest."

Defendant DOJ's Failure to Timely Comply with Plaintiffs' Request

28. By letter to plaintiffs dated November 1, 2001, defendant DOJ advised plaintiffs that their request for expedited processing had been "granted" on the ground that the request concerned "(a) matter of widespread and exceptional media interest in which there exist possible questions about the government's integrity which affect public confidence." To date, defendant DOJ has not provided a substantive response to plaintiffs' request, despite the statutory requirement that all requests (even those that don't warrant expedition) must be processed within twenty working days, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(A)(i).

29. Plaintiffs have exhausted the applicable administrative remedies with respect to their FOIA request to defendant DOJ.

30. Defendant DOJ has wrongfully withheld the requested records from plaintiffs.

The INS' Failure to Timely Comply with Plaintiffs' Request

31. Notwithstanding the statutory, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(E)(ii), and regulatory, 28 CFR 16.5(d)(4), time limit of ten calendar days in which to respond to a request for expedited processing, the INS has not responded to plaintiffs' request for expedited processing of their FOIA request.

32. To date, the INS has not provided a substantive response to plaintiffs' request, despite the statutory requirement that

all requests (even those that don't warrant expedition) must be processed within twenty working days, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(A)(i).

33. Plaintiffs are entitled to expedited processing of their FOIA request to the INS under the standards contained in defendant DOJ's regulations.

34. Plaintiffs have exhausted the applicable administrative remedies with respect to their FOIA request to the INS.

35. The INS has wrongfully withheld the requested records from plaintiffs.

CAUSES OF ACTION

First Cause of Action:

Violation of the Freedom of Information Act for Failure Timely to Respond to Request for Expedited Processing

36. Plaintiffs repeat and reallege paragraphs 1-35.

37. The INS' failure timely to respond to plaintiff's request for expedited processing violates the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(E)(ii), and defendant DOJ's own regulation promulgated thereunder, 28 CFR 16.5(d)(4).

Second Cause of Action:

Violation of the Freedom of Information Act for Failure Timely to Respond to Request for Agency Records

38. Plaintiffs repeat and reallege paragraphs 1-35.

39. Defendant DOJ's failure timely to respond to plaintiff's request for agency records violates the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(A)(i).

40. The INS' failure timely to respond to plaintiff's request for agency records violates the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(A)(i).

Third Cause of Action:

Violation of the Freedom of Information Act
for Failure Timely to Release Agency Records

41. Plaintiffs repeat and reallege paragraphs 1-35.

42. Defendant DOJ's failure timely to release the agency records requested by plaintiffs violates the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

43. The INS' failure timely to release the agency records requested by plaintiffs violates the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

Fourth Cause of Action:

Violation of the First Amendment
for Failure to Release Court Records

44. Plaintiffs repeat and reallege paragraphs 1-35.

45. Defendant DOJ's failure to release to plaintiffs those requested agency records that are also court records violates plaintiffs' First Amendment right of access to records concerning judicial proceedings.

46. The INS' failure to release to plaintiffs those requested agency records that are also court records violates plaintiffs' First Amendment right of access to records concerning judicial proceedings.

Fifth Cause of Action:

Violation of the Common Law Right of
Access for Failure to Release Court Records

47. Plaintiffs repeat and reallege paragraphs 1-35.

48. Defendant DOJ's failure to release to plaintiffs those requested agency records that are also court records violates plaintiffs' common law right of access to records concerning judicial proceedings.

49. The INS' failure to release to plaintiffs those requested agency records that are also court records violates plaintiffs' common law right of access to records concerning judicial proceedings.

Requested Relief

WHEREFORE, plaintiffs pray that this Court:

- A. order defendant to process plaintiffs' FOIA requests immediately;
- B. order defendant to disclose the requested records and make copies available to plaintiffs;
- C. provide for expeditious proceedings in this action;
- D. award plaintiffs their costs and reasonable attorneys fees incurred in this action; and
- E. grant such other relief as the Court may deem just and proper.

Respectfully submitted,

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