

From detainee facility to health advocacy center: A new role for Guantanamo?

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A new article suggests that the United States government should convert the Guantanamo Bay detainee facility in Cuba into a biomedical research institute dedicated to combating diseases of poverty. In an Editorial in the open-access journal *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, Editor-in-Chief Peter Hotez says that the transformed facility would be in an optimal position to directly address the poverty-promoting diseases and health disparities of the Americas.

The suggestion comes in response to the Bush administration's expressed interest in closing the detainee facility and in view of the significant health issues in the Americas. Five Latin American nations, namely Bolivia, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua, exhibit low economic growth, low life expectancy, and high disease rates, presenting a bleak picture of poverty, malnutrition, and disease that compares with many regions of sub-Saharan Africa.

As a converted biomedical research facility, the center could conduct research to develop new drugs and vaccines for neglected diseases, promote clinical research and take on the control of some of the more pressing public health threats. It could serve as a vital resource for training physicians, scientists, and public health experts, and meet an important demand for training in applying appropriate technology to global public health practice.

According to Dr. Hotez, "It is a moral outrage that a wealthy country like the United States allows its closest neighbors to suffer from some of the

world's worst levels of disease, poverty, and malnutrition. Reinventing Guantanamo to address our hemisphere's most pressing neglected health problems could help change America's reputation and legacy in the region.

By transforming Guantanamo from a detainee facility to a center for research on the diseases of poverty, the US would show that it sincerely wants to address the Millennium Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean, and ultimately make things better for the next generation of all Americans.”

Citation: Hotez PJ (2008) Reinventing Guantanamo: From Detainee Facility to Center for Research on Neglected Diseases of Poverty in the Americas. PLoS Negl Trop Dis 2(2): e201.
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