

By San Francisco World Can't Wait

January 13, 2015, UC Berkeley Law: On the second afternoon of the new semester, 35 people arrived at Boalt Hall for a press conference and speak-out.

Called by the local chapters of World Can't Wait, the National Lawyers Guild, and Code Pink, this protest marked the 13th

anniversary of Guantánamo and raised three demands: Close Guantanamo Now – Prosecute All the Torturers – and Fire, Disbar and Prosecute John Yoo.

There's a wonderful 20-minute "mini-documentary" radio broadcast highlighting the event that was aired later that afternoon on KPFA's Flashpoints news show, produced by Dennis Bernstein (more below). Listen here: <http://www.flashpoints.net/?p=4377>

Under signs and banners carried by protesters wearing jumpsuits and hoods, the speak-out was a powerful collection of voices, kicked off by Stephanie Tang (World Can't Wait) and attorney Sharon Adams for the National Lawyers Guild. Three Berkeley Law alums next took the bullhorn, all well-known for their life's work as lawyers defending justice and rights: Ann Fagan Ginger, Dan Siegel, and Stephen Bingham all spoke to the total outrage of having illegal torture condoned as legal, and having a war criminal teaching at Boalt.

Bingham spoke of the anger growing among many alumni over UC's newest reward to Yoo, the oldest endowed chair in the law school.

Toby Blome from Code Pink made the connections between the drone wars and the torture. Jeff Paterson (Courage to Resist and Chelsea Manning Support Network) brought solidarity from military resisters and recalled that one result of Chelsea's courage was the release of the Guantanamo Files.

Nova from the Revolution Club called on us all to see the connections under a system that generates these abuses and police brutality and murder at home, and to look to a whole different world.

And a Boalt law student stepped forward to tell of her shame at having Yoo teaching here, and to say today she was joining this group in protest.

Then led by the "prisoners" and banners, the whole speak-out crowd filed into the law school and marched to the office of Boalt's new dean, Sujit Choudry. We carried photographs of the Guantanamo child prisoner Omar Khadr.

A Canadian native, Omar Khadr was 15 years old when he first entered Guantanamo, and only left that hellhole 10 years later under a coerced plea bargain that sent him to spend 8 more years in a Canadian prison.

Like the other 778 prisoners held at Guantanamo since 2002, Omar Khadr was tortured physically and mentally.

He suffers permanent damage (he lost one eye at Guantanamo and is in present danger of losing the other eye now due to lack of proper medical treatment in Canada).

In 2010 Sujit Choudry was an attorney with the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association,

and was co-counsel on a brief on behalf of Omar Khadr before Canada's Supreme Court (which did rule that the Canadian government had violated Khadr's rights). So Dean Choudry knows well the story of Omar Khadr's torture, and presumably had to study up on what happened in that prison more generally.

People who remember the former dean's protection of John Yoo are hopeful that the new dean will understand his duty to open a full investigation under UC rules into John Yoo's work enabling illegal torture, and move that process toward firing Yoo.

Sharon Adams and Therese Davis delivered to the dean's door a petition organized by the National Lawyers Guild, protesting the awarding of the endowed chair to Torture Professor John Yoo, and bearing over 3,000 signatures gathered in just a few months. The dean wasn't home to receive his guests, but you can hear some back-and-forth between the dean's chief of staff and Sharon Adams and Ann Fagan Ginger, and Susan Harman.

(The male voice is the law school's public relations officer.

He admitted to us that he "doesn't think much about" what international or U.S. law say about torture.)

Outside the dean's office hang several original paintings by Fernando Botero. They depict his nightmarish vision of the torture at Abu Ghraib.

Many find this juxtaposition of proudly displaying the Abu Ghraib paintings, at the school which allows the lawyer whose work product enabled this grotesque, violent mistreatment and murder under official U.S. authority, just too bizarre for words.

But we did end our visit to the dean in front of one of the Botero paintings (showing a snarling dog attacking a bound prisoner, which in fact did happen at Abu Ghraib), with a solemn presentation by Janet Weil (Code Pink) of a poem written by a Guantanamo prisoner, Mohammed el Gharani.

With no police in sight to clear the halls, we held a circle conversation for another half hour, grappling with this anniversary of torture, the incredible situation that Guantanamo is still open, and what next steps could be taken toward both closing Guantanamo AND forcing the prosecution of all those responsible including John Yoo.