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## Musicians tell US to ban using songs as torture

A new anti-torture initiative called Zero dB is hoping to bring an end to the controversial interrogation techniques used by US forces

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guardian.co.uk, Wednesday 10 December 2008 13.10 GMT

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Rage Against the Machine ... protesting against Guantanamo Bay at the Reading festival.  
Photograph: Chiaki Nozu/Filmmagic.com/Getty Images

The list of bands whose music is used to torture prisoners in Guantanamo Bay reads like a grim roll call of American pop culture. Metallica, Britney Spears and even the Sesame Street theme tune have all been blasted into cells at Camp X-Ray, with the intention of traumatising and destabilising its inhabitants. But a new anti-torture initiative called Zero dB is hoping to bring an end to the technique by gathering the support of musicians whose songs are used in controversial interrogation techniques by US forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay.

Reprieve, the human rights charity that provides legal representation for inmates at Guantanamo bay, is behind the campaign. "In the long-term, we hope raising awareness of this issue will pressurise the United Nations and the British government to uphold the treaties that ban the use of torture," said Reprieve's press officer Alex Grace. "But we also hope that the campaign will attract the attention of high-profile musicians who are willing to speak out against this incredibly horrible form of no-touch psychological torture."

One such band who have already registered their disgust are agit-prop US rockers Rage Against the Machine. "I suggest they level Guantanamo Bay," began RATM's guitarist Tom Morello during a concert in San Francisco earlier this year, "but they keep one small cell and they put Bush in there ... and they blast some Rage Against the Machine." It's not the first time Morello and his group have acknowledged their distaste for the Bush administration and the war on terror. Since Rage Against the Machine's reunion in 2007, the band have taken to the stage dressed in the infamous bright orange jumpsuits and black hoods associated with Guantanamo bay prisoners.

Broadcaster Jon Snow, Martha Lane Fox and former "Gitmo" detainee Bisher al-Rawi have all signed up to campaign, which urges musicians to stop "music being used as part of psychological torture in the so-called 'war on terror'". The Musicians' Union is also hoping to mobilise support among its 30,000 members by sending out an article condemning the use of "torture music". Reprieve say they are continuing to lobby

musicians whose music is used in this way. The Associated Press lists Metallica, AC/DC, Britney Spears, Aerosmith and British singer-songwriter David Gray as among those whose songs are "blasted" at detainees in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay.

Bob Singleton, who wrote the theme tune to the US children's TV show Barney and Friends, was outraged to discover it was being used to interrogate prisoners at Guantanamo. "It absolutely ludicrous", he wrote in the Los Angeles Times. "A song that was designed to make little children feel safe and loved was somehow going to threaten the mental state of adults and drive them to the emotional breaking point?"

Reprieve filmed former Guantanamo Bay detainee Ruhul Ahmed describing his experience of torture music. "I experienced it (being played music) on many occasions. I can bear being beaten up, it's not a problem. Once you accept that you're going to go into the interrogation room and be beaten up, it's fine. You can prepare yourself mentally. But when you're being psychologically tortured, you can't."

He describes being shackled in a squatting position for anything from half an hour to a day. "Later on, from the end of 2003, they introduced the music and it became even worse. Before that, you could try and focus on something else. It makes you feel like you're going mad, it's very scary. After a while you don't hear the lyrics, you only hear heavy banging."

Binyam Mohamed, who sought asylum in the UK after fleeing Ethiopia in 1994, was detained in Pakistan on suspicion of terrorism and later transported to Guantanamo Bay. "It was pitch black, no lights on in the rooms for most of the time ... They hung me up. I was allowed a few hours of sleep on the second day, then hung up again, this time for two days," he says of his experiences at Gitmo. "My legs had swollen. My wrists and hands had gone numb ... There was loud music, Eminem's Slim Shady and Dr Dre for 20 days ..." Mohamed is still being detained by US forces in Guantanamo Bay.

However, the campaign may prove unnecessary from January 2009. During his election campaign earlier this year, president-elect Barack Obama referred to Guantanamo Bay as "a sad chapter in American History" and has since vowed to close the detention centre.

• This article was amended on Thursday December 11 2008. We referred to the UN, as opposed to the US, in the headline. This has been corrected.

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