

## Handout # 2 (Lesson 4): An Interview with Zeitoun

On August 27, 2010 columnist Amy Goodman interviewed Abdulrahman Zeitoun on her television and radio program *Democracy Now*. Below are some excerpts from that interview in which Zeitoun describes the moment of being taken into custody and what happened to him during his detention.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Their guns are drawn?

**ABDULRAHMAN ZEITOUN:** Yes, have an army ready to shoot. You know, have a, like, military, like, ready—like these guys coming for—like prepared for war. And brought us to St. Charles and Napoleon. As soon we got there, we have like, every one of us, being five, six guys jump on him and tied him down. Like I saw something like only thing you see it in the movies. Anyway, brought us to one van—

**AMY GOODMAN:** That they jump on each one of you and tie you down.

**ABDULRAHMAN ZEITOUN:** Yes. Yes, ma'am. I mean, I don't know what happens in these guys' mind. I feel something not good. And after, brought us to the van. Before that, when we were in the boat, I said, "Where are you taking us?" He said, "You know, just we take you, talk to our boss." When we got there and see this motion action, where we in the van waiting, have one guy come behind the wheel. And I ask him, "What's going on? What's wrong?" He said, "We're from Indiana. We're doing our job." That's the only thing he have to say. And I stay quiet almost like for fifteen minutes, we sitting and waiting. After that, he got the order to move. He brought us to the bus station there and processed us—

**AMY GOODMAN:** The Greyhound station.

**ABDULRAHMAN ZEITOUN:** Yes, the Greyhound station. And we stay almost like hour in the lobby there, where—and taking pictures and checking us and strip us naked and, I mean, then all the kind of—and have guys surround us like with the dog and the sort of like security, very high security, you know? I don't know how to describe it. I was just very—we can't move. We have to stand, our leg open and our foot in place and our arm on the seat. I mean, you can't have any movement.

And after we finish, brought us to the—where the bus line up, have like—been designed like Guantánamo Bay jails, you know, like wire and like fence wires and almost like, I think, fifteen-, twenty-foot-high, and we have like cages. Brought us ourself with one of the cage. The first—I remember exactly first cage, I got next to the station, next to the engine for the train. We stay next to the engine three days, right in our ears. I mean, I think I'm becoming deaf after that, because imagine you be three days next to the engine running, because the engine generates electricity for the station.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Zeitoun, just to understand here, you had been looking for help to save your neighbors, over these days that you were saving people. Now you were brought to the Greyhound station, and you say it was built like Guantánamo, which means they

must have been spending time since the storm turning this bus station into a prison. You had been traveling a lot in your canoe. Had you seen this happening?

**ABDULRAHMAN ZEITOUN:** No, because I never got this close to the bus station, although what I saw over there, have not just—I mean, I spend some time. You have all kind of very high-tech equipment there, have a lifter, a crane, have a machine with big wheels to prepare to drive in the water. I mean, very high-tech equipment there, and this can be used to rescue people, better to build a jail. I mean, I was surprised. I mean, all kind of machineries you can imagine is there.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Why did they tell you you had been arrested, you had been detained, that you were stripped naked, that you were being imprisoned with the other men that you had been traveling around with to help others? What was your crime, did they say?

**ABDULRAHMAN ZEITOUN:** This is what I tried to find out. Every time we asked someone, and they start to throw a name at us: "You guys Taliban. You're al-Qaeda." I mean, each one guy is passing by, give us, like—I don't know. Is it like he throw it like a joke or like a serious? We don't know what this—you know, been telling us like that. And I finally had discovered—

**AMY GOODMAN:** They said you were Taliban and al-Qaeda?

**ABDULRAHMAN ZEITOUN:** Yes, this is what they were accusing us for at first. And this is why, when first day we In the bus station, these people called—what you call it, the Homeland Security on us, and have two guys come there, interview us inside. And this guy, like, shake his head, and he left. He said, "We don't have nothing with these people." You know, just left. That's why these guys think he have like when brothers from there have a big fish. And I don't know what this guy is thinking.

And also, after three days, we've been transferred to Baton Rouge, also have to, after like a week from being transferred to Baton Rouge, we have FBI or some high official guys, very, very, very intelligent people come to us and interview me and other—my friends. And he tell maybe like that. He said, "Look, we don't have nothing on you. We never have anything on you. Just up to these people, you know, what they do." He asked me, "What I can do to help you?" And I request for him to call my wife, tell her I'm OK. And he did. And the people in jail in Baton Rouge—and anywhere in New Orleans, too—nobody give us chance to call or just to pass message to my wife to say I'm here or I'm alive. Every time I ask somebody, "Please call my wife," he say, "We can't do that." "Give me—let me make phone call." "We can't let you do that." And it happened almost like three weeks. I never have a chance to call my wife, let her know where I am.

Source: Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, August 27, 2010.

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