

## The Tallahassee Uyghur Resettlement Plan

An interfaith coalition in Tallahassee, Florida, prepared the following plan to accept three Uyghur detainees from Guantánamo Bay in their community. This plan, along with another plan prepared by a Uyghur community in Fairfax County, Virginia, were instrumental in Judge [Ricardo Urbina's October 2008 ruling](#) [1] that the 17 Uyghur detainees at Guantánamo must be released into the United States. The Obama administration [won its appeal of the ruling](#) [2].

The coalition shared its plan, organized into the following sections:

- [The Steering Committee](#)
- [Money](#)
- [Non-monetary Components of the Day to Day Realities](#)
- [The Wider Support Group](#)

### The Steering Committee

The operational responsibility for resettlement and monetary disbursements will be handled by a committee.

#### Membership

1. Chair. Salah Bakhshwin, member of the Shura Council (governing body) of the Islamic Center of Tallahassee who has worked on Guantánamo issues as a stateside Arabic translator.
2. Secretary. Kent Spriggs, experienced Guantánamo habeas counsel (but not for any of the Uighurs). Liaison with the counsel for the Uighurs. Knowledge of the context of the Uighurs at Guantánamo. In a position to spend as much time as is necessary on the resettlement project. He has visited Afghanistan working on repatriation issues.
3. Rev. John Lown, Pastor of Lafayette Presbyterian Church, who has three years of full-time experience in refugee resettlement as the Program Coordinator for the Virginia Council of Churches Refugee Resettlement Program working in Northern Virginia.
4. Rev. Brant Copeland, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Co-chair of the Tallahassee Interfaith Clergy, which will tie in a wider faith community. See “Wider Support Group.”
5. Shirley Zahn has worked as a mental health professional for the Florida Department of Corrections working with incarcerated men dealing with problems of depression and post traumatic stress syndrome. She had traveled extensively in Islamic countries.

#### Fundamental roles

Money – raising money (a task shared with the Wider Support Group) and disbursement.

Day to day liaison with the men on all elements of resettlement discussed below.

#### Money



a. Fund-raising and custodian

i. Central financial repository. First Presbyterian Church performed this function citywide for Katrina. The church has set up a separate account for this project. The bookkeeping procedures are those previously used for Katrina, so there is no learning curve. The current balance is \$9200. The process of raising money has just commenced.

ii. Other tax-exempt conduits to feed into the central repository, e.g., Presbyterians, Temple Israel, Quakers, Unitarian Universalists, United Church of Christ, Methodists and others. See Wider Support Group, below.

b. Disbursement. The Steering Committee would approve major expenditures and give instructions to First Presbyterian Church. A subset of the Committee will approve lesser expenditures.

## Non-monetary Components of the Day to Day Realities

**Spiritual home:** The Islamic Center of Tallahassee

### Housing:

- The Committee has secured an appropriate apartment near public transportation and the Islamic Center.
- Furnishings will be donated and bought.
- Cell phones will be provided to each of the men (ID card necessary or lend phones of others)

### Jobs:

- The Committee has firm job offers for the three men at Bianca Restaurants owned by a member of the Islamic Center. These will be jobs that require modest English and working skills until we know the skill levels and interests of the men.
- Eventually men can decide on what is a good fit of a job based on more refined skill sets, if any.
- Committee will deal with legal issues related to employment. The United States Parole Office in Tallahassee has already indicated it can be of assistance in this working with INS.

### Transportation

a. Initially public transport supplemented by volunteer supporters.

**A Welcome and Transportation Committee** will be made up of persons who volunteer from the mosques, churches, and the synagogue.

b. Self-sufficiency

- Establish driving skills of one or more of the men.
- United States Parole Office will assist in obtaining identification so that one or more of the men can obtain drivers' license(s). Committee will assist in getting licensed.
- When drivers' permits are obtained, the Committee will buy a used car.

- Committee will pay for automobile insurance.

## Health

Checkup by doctor and dentist and provision for care. These professional services will be donated and/or financed by the Committee.

Psychological assessment is recommended if the language barrier can be handled.

## Language training

Instruction in English as second language. Tutors or program.

## General social integration

The Welcome and Transportation Committee will take responsibility for integrating the men into the community. E.g., learning how to shop, structuring opportunities to get out and about, etc.

The men will be given “hot lines” on their cell phones to a limited number of persons who will be available 24/7 to deal with problems not anticipated.

## The Wider Support Group

The organization already in place which can reach the greatest number of persons in the shortest time is the Tallahassee Interfaith Clergy. A substantial part of this is already in place in that a number of religious leaders have signed on as of this writing.

The functions of the wider support group are:

- Dissemination of knowledge of the project. Education of congregations has commenced.
- Public endorsement of the project and welcome on behalf of more than 15 communities of faith.
- Money-raising. Substantial money has been raised already and that effort is just beginning.
- Responding to “wish lists,” e.g., furniture for dwelling.
- Provide some of the persons for the Welcome and Transportation Committee.

**Source URL:** <https://www.nogitmos.org/tallahasseeuyghurresettlementplan0>

### Links:

[1] <http://www.scotusblog.com/wp/federal-judge-orders-uighurs-in-us-by-friday/>

[2] <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/homepage/story/62415.html>