

Ash Wednesday Defendants NOT GUILTY!

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Ash Wednesday Defendants NOT GUILTY!

In a historic decision five Catholic Worker activists were acquitted earlier this evening of Disorderly Conduct charges for blocking the main entrance to Hancock Air Base, home of the 174th Attack Wing of the Air National Guard, Syracuse, New York. Hancock is a Reaper drone hub whose technicians pilot weaponized drones over Afghanistan.

The five went "pro se," defending themselves in the De Witt town court of Judge Robert Jokl. In his closing statement Fr. Bill Picard said, "We pray for you, Judge Jokl, to have the courage to do the right and courageous thing."

On Acquitting the Defendants, the Judge said that the ADA had not met the burden of proof for the charge of Disorderly Conduct because the protesters were not on public property, therefore could not be creating a 'public' nuisance. However, after the verdict was announced, the D.A. objected, and the judge said to him that he hadn't found "mens rea," Latin for "guilty mind." The five defendants, with powerful eloquence, convinced the judge that their intent was to uphold, not break, the law. This acquittal marks a major breakthrough by those who have sought to strengthen international law, and stop U.S. war crimes, including extra-judicial murder by the illegal drones.

Defendant Carmen Trotta said, "We are happy to be part of a

groundswell of opposition to the drones. What a joy to win such a verdict on what is officially United Nations day. We told the judge that we were not alienated citizens, but rather engaged citizens! Ultimately it seems he was moved by our consciences.” Carmen noted the recent groundswell included Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, and the head of the Jesuits Order, Alfonso Nicolas, UN Special Rapporteur Mr. Emmerson, and the Nobel Peace Nominee, the young Pakistani girl shot for promoting education for women and girls, in Pakistan, all of whom have condemned U.S. drone strikes.

Defendant Linda LeTendre stated, “My hope is that dissent is once again welcome in the US and we turn away from killing to caring as a country.”

Ellen Grady stated, “We pray and will continue to act that the children of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and all countries will some day soon be without the terror of drones or any wars!”

They are:

- Fr. Bill Frankle-Streit of Virginia;
- Linda Le Tendre of Saratoga Springs; NY
- Ellen Grady of Ithaca, NY;
- Carmen Trotta of New York, NY;
- Fr. Bill Pickard of Scranton, PA.

Ash Wednesday Statement – Feb. 13.2013:

We come to Hancock Airfield, home of the National Reaper Drone Maintenance and Training Center, this Ash Wednesday, to remember the victims of our drone strikes and to ask God’s forgiveness for the killing of other human beings, most especially children.

The killer drone strikes and the US’s killer drone policies have taken the lives of thousands in a number of countries,

such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq and Somalia. These strikes are illegal and immoral. Under international agreements, which the US has signed, the killing of civilians, extra-judicial murders, violations of national sovereignty, and violations of due process are ALL illegal acts.

We come to Hancock Airfield this Ash Wednesday to repent for the actions of our government and to ask God's forgiveness and the forgiveness of the people we daily terrorize with these drones.

We remind ourselves that our lives are brief and mysterious, and that "from dust we were created and to dust we shall return!" The significance of our brief animation is the degree to which we love one another.

Lent is a time to repent—literally, to change our minds. It is a time to REMIND ourselves of Jesus' command to love our neighbors and our enemies. It is a time to REMIND ourselves of Jesus' radical, non-violent message love.

Stop the Killing.

Ground the Drones.

STOP the Wars.