

Justice for Aafia US Tour Diary: Final day

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I have never met Dr Aafia Siddiqui but I feel as though I know more about her now having embarked on a six-state tour of the USA to promote awareness about the injustices of her case.

Last night marked the final event and for me it was probably the most significant because of the people who turned out in their hundreds.

I learned so much more about the personal side of Aafia last night than I have since I began investigating her kidnap and disappearance from her home city of Karachi way back in March 2003.

You see many of those who turned up for the final leg of my tour with the Muslim Legal Fund of America simply wanted to show their support and solidarity for the mother-of-three because they know Aafia so well.

She moved into their community in Texas in 1990 to be near her brother, and after spending a year at the University of Houston, transferred to MIT in Boston.

But throughout her time in the USA she was a frequent visitor to her brother's family home where she was hugely respected and admired by the neighbours.

One took to the stage of the Taj Hall near Savoy Drive, Houston last night to share his memories of Aafia Siddiqui and the rest of her family he had gleaned over 25 years.

He said it was as likely that she was a member of al-Qaida as his own mother who, he added with a smile, was a good Roman Catholic lady.

He examined in forensic detail all the media speculation, planted stories and rumours killing each one off with his own personal facts and observations giving us an insight into the woman many of you only know as the Grey Lady of Bagram, Prisoner 650.

We also learned about Aafia's favourite uncle in Islamabad - a man with a gift for spinning the most mundane stories into extravagant, amusing vignettes. According to the uncle, Aafia visited him during a period when she had disappeared and he told gullible journalists how she had appeared to him wearing a full face veil. At one stage she let her veil slip to reveal a new look as a result of extensive cosmetic surgery performed to change her facial appearance.

Enjoying the attention from the media, he embellished his story in details as each journalist arrived at his home.

Of course this does not explain how Aafia looks today. Did she really go to the bother of cosmetic surgery only to have the surgeons undo and reverse all of their work?

No one doubts the uncle did have a female visitor to his home posing as Aafia but it is quite clear to all now that she was working for the intelligence agencies to try and muddy the water over Aafia's whereabouts when she was in the hands of the US.

In fact a lot of people have gone to a great deal of trouble to cover up her disappearance and I believe this is for many different reasons ... not least of all two of her three children are US citizens who have rights under US law and it appears those rights have indeed been violated by - US lawmakers of all people.

The time has come for transparency and the clock is now ticking against all of those involved in the kidnapping, rendition and shooting of Aafia.

An entire community in Houston knows the case against her is a tissue of lies. The majority of Pakistani people have also seen through the deceit and now the Muslim world is beginning to peer closely into the case with growing shock and disbelief.

Only the US Ambassador in Islamabad Anne W. Patterson - a relic of the Bush Administration - is in complete denial about Aafia's case ... time to give it up Anne you are beginning to look increasingly ridiculous by claiming she was never held in Bagram. We have the evidence. You've already had to retract statements about women in Bagram and your credibility really is on the line.

When the US Embassy in Islamabad sent a series of letters to the local Pakistan newspapers to try and refute my story about Prisoner 650, the Grey Lady of Bagram I knew there was a sense of panic. The steps taken by the US Ambassador and her staff was without precedent.

But the folk I feel more pity for are the lawyers on the prosecution team who have to peddle the lies and misinformation given to them by the FBI. They've already asked for two trial adjournments - well you can't fire a gun when you've no ammunition, can you?

Or, as my great Uncle Vern from Minnesota once observed: "You can't soar with eagles when you work with turkeys."

And this trial is not a secret military tribunal in Guantanamo hidden away from the world's media. Aafia's case will receive global attention when it opens next January and while the New York judge appears to be doing his best to be fair and even handed, the prosecution is flailing around with a pig in a poke. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter how much lipstick the FBI uses on this pig it will still be a pig when the trial opens.

And it doesn't matter how many threats or intimidation are used in an attempt to stop me or others like me from revealing the truth, we will continue to demand justice and continue to fight for justice for as long as it takes.

The US authorities can end this charade now by showing compassion and returning Aafia to her family immediately.

Surely the time has come for damage limitation - retrieving just a little dignity has to be better than continuing with deceit and acts of desperation.