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JUDGE DECIDES TO DEVOTE FOUR MONTHS TO STUDYING ISSUES AND TESTIMONY PRESENTED IN “CREECH 14” CASE

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The “Creech 14” went to trial on September 14, 2010 in Clark County Regional Court in Las Vegas, Nevada. The case originated during a week of demonstrations and vigils in April 2009, when the activists entered Creech Air Force Base in Indian Springs to highlight the serious injustice of the U.S. military’s use of drones, or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Crews at Creech control the drones used in these expanding wars, including killing civilians in remote controlled assassination attacks. The protesters were charged with trespassing. Judge William Jansen scheduled the verdict for January 27, 2011.

Judge Jansen allowed the pro-se defendants to call three expert witnesses – former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, retired Col. and former Embassy Official Ann Wright, and Bill Quigley, Legal Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights.

“Targeted assassinations by Predator and Reaper drones,” said defendant Renee Espeland, “must be catapulted into the court of public opinion. I am bound by the law of our land that makes it my duty to stop the killing of civilians and to protect U.S. soldiers being ordered to perform illegal acts.”

The judge limited the defense to questions strictly pertaining to the charge of trespass. However, through carefully crafted questions, the defendants were able to extract several key points from their witnesses:

- Intentional killing is a war crime, as embodied in U.S. constitutional law.
- Drone strikes by U.S. and coalition forces kill a disproportionate number of civilians.
- People have the right, even the duty, to stop war crimes.
- According to the Nuremberg principles, individuals are required to disobey domestic orders that cause crimes against humanity.

Defendant Brian Terrell delivered the group's closing statement. Referring to earlier mention of a classic metaphor used in cases invoking the necessity defense, he depicted a house on fire, with a baby trapped inside. “The house is on fire; the baby is in the house,” said Terrell, “We fourteen are ones who see the smoke, and will not allow a ‘no trespass’ sign to stop us from reaching burning children.” Terrell was speaking about the civilian deaths caused by U.S. drones in Afghanistan.

The Creech 14 include Fr. John Dear, SJ; Dennis DuVall; Renee Espeland; Judy Homanich; Kathy Kelly; Fr. Steve Kelly, SJ; Mariah Klusmire; Brad Lyttle; Libby Pappalardo; Sr. Megan Rice, SHCJ; Brian Terrell; Eve Tetaz; Fr. Louie Vitale, OFM; and Fr. Jerry Zawada, OFM.

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