

Military Families **SPEAK OUT**

**Support our troops,
bring them home now,
and take care of them
when they get here.**

Summer-Fall, 2016

MFSO Members Outraged

This statement was sent to the press.

Military Families Speak Out (MFSO) members are outraged by the recent attack by Presidential candidate Donald Trump on Gold Star parents Ghazala and Khizr Khan whose son, Captain Humayun Khan, was killed in Iraq. MFSO is an organization of family members whose loved ones have served or are currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Some of our members have loved ones who were killed in Iraq or Afghanistan or have died by suicide.

While MFSO members oppose military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, we love and support our troops. We honor our soldiers and Marines. Mr. Khan bravely talked about the need for the Commander in Chief to have respect, understanding and empathy for the sacrifices and suffering of our troops and their families. Donald Trump has clearly shown by his disrespectful and despicable attack on a Gold Star family that he does not possess the key qualities we believe are necessary to be this country's Commander in Chief of our armed forces.

MFSO Members Outraged with Treatment of Families Whose Loved Ones Have Died by Suicide

MFSO members find ourselves in a position similar to that of the Khan family. We are being disrespected by the Department of Defense policy regarding loved ones in the military who have died by suicide. On **August 27, 2015**, members of MFSO, Veterans For Peace, and Iraq Veterans Against the War met with the Office of Public Engagement and Joining Forces regarding our opposition to military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, our call for diplomacy, and our concerns about care for our veterans and military families. Two members of our delegation, Joyce and Kevin Lucey, spoke at the meeting about their son, CPL Jeffrey Lucey, who died by suicide after he was denied care by the VA.

We spoke at the meeting about our recommendations for changes to prevent suicide.

This was the third meeting of Military Families Speak Out with the Office of Public Engagement. Each time we had requested to meet directly with President Obama but were denied such a meeting.

On August 28, Marcia Westbrook, a member of the Steering Committee of MFSO, called in distress to tell us that her son, SFC Tyler Westbrook died by suicide.



When we called to tell people from the White House meeting the day before, they were very sympathetic. We were asked to get the address of the Westbrook family so that President Obama could send a letter of condolence. We did provide that information.

As one of our MFSO members left to go to Williamstown, West Virginia for the funeral several days later, she received a call from the Office of Public Engagement that Department of Defense policy would not allow a letter of condolence to be sent because SFC Westbrook died by suicide while stationed in the United States. If he had died by suicide while deployed abroad, a letter could be sent. We were outraged. How could we tell that to the family?

It's a despicable policy which shows absolutely NO empathy, and NO understanding for our troops, veterans, or military families. It only reinforces the stigma already rampant in the military, the stigma attached to our troops and veterans reaching out for and receiving help for the moral injuries and/or traumas from their military service. We know that alcohol abuse and steroid


use was rampant at Ft. Carson where SFC Westbrook was based. We know that SFC Westbrook was a victim of alcohol abuse, and we know there were numerous other red flags which were overlooked by the military. SFC Westbrook was a highly accomplished soldier, and was a member of the Special Forces when he died. SFC Westbrook left behind a wife and a 2-year-old son. His two brothers are also members of the military. Both of his grandparents were WW II veterans.

We have pressed for the DOD policy to be reversed. On August 28, MFSO will send an open letter to President Obama and will launch a campaign to demand a change in policy.

Check www.militaryfamiliespeakout.com to find out how you can help.

**HOMEFRONT
911**

HOW FAMILIES
OF VETERANS
ARE WOUNDED
BY OUR WARS



STACY BANNERMAN
Creator and Director of
Homefront 911: Military Family Monologues

In Homefront 911
Stacy Bannerman is a nationally recognized advocate for military families who has testified before Congress, provides an insider's view of an emerging crisis in today's military families.

Combining her own experiences with those of other caregivers, she describes the prolonged strain on the parents, children, and spouses of veterans as they battle with overwhelmed VA offices, a public they feel doesn't understand their sacrifices, and a nation that still isn't fully prepared to help those who have given so much. She shares with readers the tools she and others have found to heal, and she advocates policies and ways to help repair the broken agreement that the nation will care for its returning soldiers and their families.

Purchase *Homefront 911* at Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, or your local bookseller. Contact: www.stacybannerman.com

Deported Veterans: A National Disgrace

MFSO is deeply concerned about a long standing practice toward veterans that has been devastating thousands of our loved ones for the past 20 years with little fanfare. According to veteran advocates, tens of thousands of honorably discharged American veterans have been deported,

many of whom are currently living in border towns in Mexico with little hope of ever returning to their families and loved ones back home in the US. Before being permanently exiled, all of these veterans lived as permanent U.S. residents, and some of those were brought here as children, do not speak Spanish and this is the only country they have known.

Since the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act in 1996, (IIRIR), veterans, even those having survived several deployments or severe illnesses, face deportation hearings for a wide range of crimes that were once considered minor but are now felonies. Drug use and domestic violence seem to be the biggest violations.

This is not news for any of our MFSO members, who know from firsthand experience that these crimes are at epidemic levels within the recently returned veteran community and who too often suffer from PTSD and moral injury. Once deported, they become attractive candidates for drug cartels who promise about one month's pay for a day's work. About the only other major employment option for English speaking veterans is in telemarketing.

This is a shameful practice about which even many foreign born veterans are themselves shocked to learn. So how is that returning veterans do not know if they are US citizens or not? That is because prior to the war in Vietnam, it was common practice to automatically grant citizenship to all honorably discharged veterans, so it is understandable that many of our older veterans are surprised to learn years later that if they commit a crime, they are not protected like all other US citizens from deportation. In fact, they lose all of their VA benefits, except medications which can be mailed. The assumption of automatic citizenship makes sense when you think about the swearing-in ceremony for servicemen and women, which takes place at a very official ceremony in front of the US flag. According to Margaret Stock, attorney for the Cross Border Law Center in Anchorage, Alaska, young recruits, "raised their right hands and swore to defend the Constitution" thinking that that ceremony officially made them citizens.

This is a big problem for our foreign born troops after 9-11 as well. According to a 2008 Pentagon report, over 8,000 non-citizens enlist every year. After 2001, and especially because of the rush to war in Iraq and Afghanistan, no consistent policy was implemented that would inform veterans about needing to ensure their citizenship after leaving their service. "Recruiters mislead people. They tell them that citizenship is automatic", says Stock. After 2009, the Army and then later the Navy and Marine Corps offered a quicker path to citizenship by offering citizenship ceremonies after boot camp.

Even so, the law only allows them to get naturalized while deployed, so of course, few of our foreign born troops, who are trying their best to fit into American military life and are in the midst of fighting for their very lives, have citizenship on their minds. They trusted America enough to put their lives on the line but never expected such a betrayal as this. In fact, few of these foreign born recruits were ever on board with the US mission of invading another country of mostly poor people like them in the first place, but joined the military hoping to get citizenship and follow the American promise of having a better future for them and their families.

And so, these deported veterans, after having honorably served their country, even after several deployments, are routinely ushered out of detention centers, driven across the border, unceremoniously dumped there and told to "run".

There is one way, however, for veterans that have been permanently exiled to legally return to the US – as happened to the son of MFSO member and Gold Star dad, Fernando Suarez del Solar. Jesus Alberto was killed in Iraq after stepping on an American cluster bomb while fighting in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. After he was killed, he was given a funeral with full military honors in Escondido, CA.

By Pat Alviso, MFSO, Ocean County, CA

If you would like to help stop this injustice to our veterans here is what you can do:

Reach out or donate to:
Veterans for Peace at veteransforpeace.org

Deported Veterans Justice Project
P.O. Box 26853, San Diego, CA. 92196
Email jallan.ruhman@gmail.com

Banished veterans on Facebook
Email: banishedveterans@gmail.com

Forum: Confronting Extremist Violence, the Refugee Crisis, and Fear: Faith Responses



Photo of panel members and Ahmad Al-Abboud, the father of the first Syrian Refugee Family in Kansas City.

I had the privilege of working on the development of a forum entitled "Confronting Extremist Violence, the Refugee Crisis, and Fear: Faith Responses." Panelists for this enlightening forum were leaders of the Catholic, Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith communities as well as Lt. Col. Brian Steed, a military history instructor. We had a surprise guest of honor, Ahmad Al-Abboud, the father of the first Syrian refugee family to arrive in Kansas City expressing his sincere appreciation and thanks to his new home town.

The event was attended by over 350 people. Military Families Speak Out was one over two dozen sponsors. This May 16 event was developed by the American Friends Service Committee, The Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council, and Kansas City Public Library.
By Mary Hladky, MFSO, Kansas City, MO

Forum at John Jay College Criminal Justice, NYC. May 22, 2016
Bringing the Battlefield Home: Suicide, Heartache and Healing for Victims of Unjust War

An average of 22 veterans and one on active duty die by suicide every day. Children of military families are three times more likely to attempt suicide or engage in dangerous behaviors than their peers. These alarming statistics highlight the true cost of war, and how these tragedies affect communities across our country.

This roundtable discussion, hosted by Military Families Speak Out and moderated by co-founder, Nancy Lessin, was joined by families deeply affected by military suicide.



Nancy Lessin

Military family members, Joyce & Kevin Lucey, Tim Kahlor, Tracy Eiswert and Marcia Westbrook shared their very personal first-hand accounts of their children who were sent off to war, used as cannon fodder, and came back shattered. There was an in-depth discussion on the epidemic of military suicide, exploring factors including post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, moral injury and issues with care provided by the VA. Our panelists examined challenges to building the movement needed to bring an end to America's futile, endless wars and how to begin overcoming those challenges.

As a member of MFSO since 2006 and the father of a disabled veteran of the Iraq war, the chance to meet with other MFSO members and sharing our stories is always a special moment. When MFSO families meet it's an instant connection and a hug between families says it all.

The Left Forum gave members of MFSO the opportunity to educate the public about the domino effect of war and how it doesn't end when the troops come home.

MFSO members Kevin and Joyce Lucey shared the loss of their son to suicide 12 years earlier with the same emotions as if it was yesterday.

Joyce and Kevin Lucey

Tracy Eiswert, a young mother of two small girls came home in 2004 to



discover her husband had committed suicide due to battling the horrors of PTSD after the VA system denied his claim.

Tracy Eiswert



Marcia Westbrook

Marcia Westbrook the newest member to our panel of families losing love ones to suicide due to PTSD lost her son in August of 2015.

These families put a face on PTSD and suicide and how the effects of war continue to be part of their everyday life. As a member of the panel I shared how my son has survived PTSD for over 10 years, because we were willing to go to the media and fight the system to get him the help he needed.



Timothy Kahlor

MFSO members also spent three days



tabling, talking and sharing literature to other people in support of the peace movement and making a positive difference in our world.

By Timothy Kahlor, MFSO, Southern CA



Military Families – Please Speak Out Against U.S. Military Involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan!

It was a terrible mistake when activists around the country ended their anti-war vigils when President Obama came into office. Some assumed that the promises of withdrawal of U.S. troops would happen.

Some called us unpatriotic for continuing to speak out, after all, the President won the Nobel Prize for Peace. Working for Peace is patriotic!

We will be listing ongoing vigils around the United States. If there is no vigil in your area, please work with others to form a weekly or monthly vigil. Post information about your vigil in local newspapers and in Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media. Let MFSO know.

By Paula Rogovin, MFSO, Bergen County, NJ

Ongoing vigils:

Long Beach, Orange County, CA: Every Friday. 7-9 pm. 2nd and Nieto in front of the Chase Bank in Belmont Shore. MFSO with the Long Beach Area Peace Network

Huntington Beach, CA: EVERY Sunday. 12 noon. at the foot of the Huntington Beach Pier. ENOUGH campaign.

Orange, CA: 4th Tuesday of every month. 5:30-7pm. at the Traffic Circle in Orange. MFSO and Code Pink
Seal Beach, CA: Last Wednesday of the month. 5-6:00 pm. in front of the globe at Leisure World. Senior Patriots for Peace

Los Angeles, CA: EVERY Sunday. 6am-4pm. Just north of the Santa Monica Pier, under Bubba Gumps. Arlington West

Huntington Beach CA: First Sundays. 7:30am to 3:30pm. 6th and PCH. Arlington West

Teaneck, NJ: EVERY Wednesday, 4-5 pm. National Guard Armory. Corner of Teaneck Rd. and Liberty Rd. in Teaneck. Teaneck Peace Vigil. MFSO, Bergen County, Veterans For Peace, Chapter 21 NJ.

Leonia, NJ: EVERY Sunday, 4-4:30 pm. Broad Ave. and Ft. Lee Rd. Leonia Peace Vigil Group.

Yellow Springs, OH: EVERY Saturday. corner of Xenia Ave & Limestone. Yellow Springs Friends Meeting. 937-767-1311

and flowers sway, watered by tears and rain.

War is cruel, and love must suffer long.

But can it suffer so in vain?

Do you hear their voices calling from out those empty boots? We went where we were sent, and there we faced the worst.

Upon our broken bodies, dare you take a stand? Or will our deaths, just like our lives be lost in desert sand.



Join MFSO members at the World Beyond War Conference

Sept. 23-25 in Washington, DC

- Strategies to End War
- learn about and engage in working on viable alternatives to war and militarism
- Remaking the Mass Media for Peace
- Capitalism and transition to Peace Economy
- The Racism of War
- Diplomacy, Aid, and Nonviolent Peacekeeping and Protection
- Disarmament, and Abolishing Nuclear Weapons
- Closing Bases
- Protecting the Environment from War by Ending War
- Changing War Culture to Peace Culture
- International Law. Can War Makers Be Held Accountable?
- Can We Achieve Truth and Reconciliation?
- Demonstrations, Direct Action, Resistance and Counter-Recruitment
- Untold History of the United States
- Nonviolent Action: Getting to Work

Empty Boots, by Rosemarie (MFSO member)

His boots are empty now, the hopeful one who wore them ground beneath the juggernaut of war. Where we laid him, a stone will stay, flags flutter,

Joy First Issues Call to Civil Resistance

On April 28, the Peace Works community of Kansas City, MO, met Joy First. Joy has been an active antiwar activist since 2002 and has been arrested more than 40 times. She spoke to us

about her spiritual calling to nonviolent civil resistance – which mean she stands up to our government when it breaks U.S. and international laws.

Joy says speaking out with the possibility of arrest is what she is compelled to do, our country's illegal wars have caused immense human suffering, at home and abroad, and must end. Joy clearly stated that the "answers" to war don't lie within the Democratic and Republican parties or their candidates. Wars have become endless no matter who is in office. It is up to us, the people, to object to war and drone warfare, and the many other ills of our society. We, the people, must get out into the streets to demand the change we want to see. That is how real, lasting change happens.

ALSO, I participated in PeaceWorks' Memorial Day Walk/ Die-In at the very large new plant in Kansas City that makes parts for nuclear weapons. The original Kansas City plant was closed due to vast contamination. One of the photos attached shows the long list of contaminants found reported by the Department of Labor – over 2,000 contaminants have been documented.



I want to urge veterans and military family members in the Kansas City, MO area to participate in vigils and other activities sponsored by Peace Works. For info. go to www.peaceworkskc.org.
By Mary Hladky, MFSO, Kansas City, MO

MFSO members and friends after an MFSO Focus Group at the Veterans For Peace Convention in San Diego, CA, on August 13.



Boots on the Ground?

IRAQ

According to the Washington Post, **"the U.S. military has around 5,000 service members in Iraq."** (*The U.S. military has a lot more people in Iraq than it has been saying.* by Missy Ryan, 3/21/16) According to the article, the official cap on the number of troops is 3,870. "If the Obama administration were to classify the Marines and other additional personnel as permanent, it would be required to increase that official force level reported in its monthly "boots on the ground" notification to Congress."

AFGHANISTAN

"President Obama said Wednesday that **he planned to leave 8,400 American troops in Afghanistan until the end of his term**, further slowing the drawdown in a 14-year war that Mr. Obama pledged to end on his watch but now seems likely to grind on indefinitely." (*Obama Says He Will Keep More Troops in Afghanistan Than Planned*, by Mark Landler. *New York Times*. 7/6/16)

Military Families Speak Out demands:
End U.S. military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan.
Bring all of our troops home NOW!
Take care of them when they get here!

Military Families
SPEAK OUT

If you have a loved one serving in the armed forces, please join MFSO.
Contact Pat Alviso at mfso@mfso.org.
Or find MFSO at www.mfso.org or at Military Families Speak Out on Facebook.