NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

A week of trials for anti-drone activists

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy | Feb. 7, 2014 NCR Today

Peace activists on the East and West coasts were on trial this week for their opposition to the U.S. drone program, reports blogger David Swanson over at warisacrime.org [1].

On Monday, four activists stood trial in Sacramento, Calif., for their April 2013 anti-drone protest at Beale Air Force Base. The four were arrested and charged with trespassing while attempting to deliver a letter to the base commander accusing President Barack Obama and all military personnel involved in the drone program with crimes against humanity and multiple violations of the law. (See the letter below.)

According to *The Fresno Bee* [2], a federal judge found the four activists guilty of trespassing and sentenced them to 90 days of unsupervised probation, which will end for each defendant upon completion of 10 hours of community service.

The four are the second group of peace activists in less than six months to be convicted of trespassing at Beale Air Force Base, home to the Global Hawk, an unarmed reconnaissance drone some describe as an "accomplice" to strikes armed drones later carry out.

Interestingly, *The Fresno Bee* reports that U.S. Magistrate Allison Claire refused the defendants a jury trial, though it was in her purview to grant one.

"Prosecutors fought to keep the cases away from a jury," the *Bee* reported. "Defense attorneys are convinced that prosecution fears 'juror nullification,' which occurs when jurors ignore the law because they disagree with it, or because they believe it should not be applied in the case before them."

Meanwhile, over in the small town of DeWitt, N.Y., the trial of 17 anti-drone activists, arrested October 2012 at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base, continues. Located near Syracuse, Hancock is a hub for operators who pilot armed Reaper drones to launch strikes in Afghanistan. Charged with trespass and disorderly conduct, the 17 activists recently concluded their closing arguments and are scheduled to be sentenced Friday.

Also Friday, five activists will appear in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Va., to appeal a trespass conviction for their June protest at the CIA. The activists attempted to deliver a letter and sought a meeting with CIA Director John Brennan concerning what they called CIA violations of international law related to illegal targeted drone killing in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and elsewhere, Swanson reports.

During last week's State of the Union, Obama spoke of putting "prudent limits" on the U.S. drone program, yet offered few specifics. A year ago, his covert targeted killing program was subjected to an intense if brief period of congressional scrutiny. This year, Obama's vague accounting of U.S. drone warfare garnered little reaction from U.S. lawmakers. How heartening it is to know that ordinary Americans are continuing to speak against a weapons program that is wreaking havoc in so many corners of the world.

An excerpt from a recent press release by activists summarizing their closing arguments at the DeWitt trial

follows:

> **OPEN LETTER TO BEALE AIR FORCE BASE PERSONNEL (April 30, 2013)**
>
> We, the people, charge the US President, Barack Obama and the full military chain of command, to Beale Air Force Base Colonel Phil Stewart, 9th Reconnaissance Wing Commander, every drone crew and service member at Beale Air Force Base, and every other U.S. base involved directly or indirectly with the U.S. drone program, with crimes against humanity, with violations of part of the Supreme Law of the Land, extrajudicial killings, violation of due process, wars of aggression, violation of national sovereignty, and killing of innocent civilians.
>
> US military and CIA Drone attacks have killed thousands of innocent civilians, including women and children, in the Middle East, Somalia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. In the name of combating terrorism against the US, we are terrorizing innocent people and creating many more enemies and potential terrorists in the process.
>
> Our government has become a lawless power, acting as judge, jury, and executioner, just because it can. The US uses remote-controlled drones to kill women in their kitchens, elders meeting in their jirgas, mourners at funerals, and rescuers who try to help the wounded. By most independent studies, the vast majority of those killed are civilians.
>
> We therefore demand:
>
> (1) An immediate ban on the use of all drones for extrajudicial killing
>
> (2) A halt to all drone surveillance that assaults basic freedoms and inalienable rights and terrorizes domestic life in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Somalia
>
> (3) A prohibition on the sale and distribution of drones and drone technology to foreign countries, in order to prevent the proliferation of this menacing threat to world peace, freedom, and security, and
>
> (4) An immediate end to this lawless behavior of drone warfare that violates many international laws and treaties.

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Links:
[1] http://warisacrime.org/content/citizen-activists-across-us-courts-week-protesting-us-weaponized-drones
[2] http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/02/03/3749400/drone-protesters-found-guilty.html