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Kuwait Urges US Solution to Striking Guantanamo Detainees

Agence France Presse
September 20, 2005

KUWAIT CITY - Kuwait's foreign minister has urged the United States to resolve the issue of hundreds of Muslim detainees imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the official KUNA news agency said Tuesday.

Sheikh Mohammad al-Sabah said he told US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that "Guantanamo represents a moral and legal challenge to the United States."

He was speaking following a meeting of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) foreign ministers and Rice in New York Monday night.

"It is not in the interest of the United States that Guantanamo detainees remain in such a situation," he said.

"I told Secretary Rice about reports on the health condition and the hunger strike by the inmates and that this was unacceptable to GCC states."

The GCC groups Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates alongside Kuwait.

"There should be ... an immediate humanitarian solution and a legal solution to the detainees in general," Sheikh Mohammad said.

The head of the society of families of Kuwaiti prisoners in Guantanamo, Khaled al-Ouda, told AFP on Sunday that six of the 11 Kuwaiti inmates have joined the hunger strike in the camp.

"Two of the six, Abdulaziz al-Shimmari and Fawzi al-Ouda, have been hospitalised after their health deteriorated for refusing to take food for five weeks," said Ouda, citing US lawyers who visited them.

"The lawyers told me the two were skin and bones and Shimmari could not walk ... The remaining four are not in good health condition."

Ouda also said the United States has agreed to release five of the Kuwaiti prisoners and expected this to take place after about a month.

The United States in January handed over Nasser Najr al-Mutairi, who spent three years in Guantanamo.

A Kuwaiti court cleared him in June of charges of undermining Kuwait's national interests by committing an act of aggression against a foreign nation.

According to Thomas Wilmer, the US lawyer defending the Kuwaitis, most of them were captured by bounty-hunters in 2001 near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and sold to the United States.

The New York Times reported Sunday that as many as 200 prisoners -- more than a third of the camp's population -- have refused food in recent weeks, while camp officials put the number at 105.

