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Two Men Claim Hunger Strike at Guantanamo

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KABUL, Afghanistan - Two Afghans released from Guantanamo Bay claimed Wednesday about 180 Afghans at the U.S. detention facility were on a hunger strike to protest alleged mistreatment and to push for freedom.

Habir Russol and Moheb Ullah Borekzai, who said they left the prison camp on Cuba on Monday and were flown to Afghanistan before being freed, said they did not participate in the hunger strike. They did not say how they knew others were refusing to eat.

A Pentagon spokesman, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Flex Plexico, said he was unaware of a hunger strike at Guantanamo Bay but would inquire.

Amnesty International in London said it knew nothing about hunger strikes at Guantanamo, other than media reports.

Russol said 180 Afghan prisoners "are not eating or drinking." He and Borekzai estimated the men were in the 14th or 15th day of their fast.

Borekzai later told The Associated Press the detainees were protesting because "some of these people say they were mistreated during interrogation. Some say they are innocent."

"They are protesting that they have been in jail nearly four years and they want to be released," he said.

Neil Koslowe, a Washington-based lawyer for 12 detainees from Kuwait, said several inmates told him during a June 20-24 visit to Guantanamo that there was a "widespread" hunger strike over the amount and quality of their drinking water.

The two Afghans released this week said they had been accused of being members of the former Taliban regime, but both said they were innocent. Neither said how long they had been detained.

The Pentagon announced, meanwhile, that seven Guantanamo detainees had been released and an eighth transferred to the custody a foreign government. In addition to the two released Afghans, three Saudi Arabians, a Jordanian and a Sudanese were freed, the Pentagon said.

The three Saudis, who were not identified, were handed over to Saudi security, the official Saudi Press Agency said in Riyadh. It did not specify whether the three were detained for questioning, saying only that "the regular procedures will be applied accordingly."

In addition, a Moroccan was transferred to control of the government of Spain, U.S. officials said. The Pentagon did not identify the detainees. The Moroccan was identified earlier this week in Spain as Lahcen Ikassrien, who had been charged there for his links to an al-Qaida cell.

The Defense Department has sought to dispute allegations of mistreatment of detainees at Guantanamo, where about 520 prisoners remain, mostly Afghans, Pakistanis and others captured after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

Military investigators said this month they proposed disciplining the prison commander because of abusive and degrading treatment of a suspected terrorist, but that the matter has been referred to the Army's inspector general instead.