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AP Files Lawsuit Seeking Documents of All Guantanamo Detainees

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NEW YORK -- The Associated Press sued the Department of Defense on Monday for the release of records identifying all past and current detainees at a U.S. military base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"Given the significant public interest in understanding the actions taken by the U.S. government with respect to the individuals held at Guantanamo Bay," the information is urgently needed, said the AP, the nation's largest news gathering organization.

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Manhattan, where a judge last month ordered the Pentagon to release to the AP the identities of several hundred detainees who had participated in hearings.

The AP, which serves more than 15,000 news outlets, filed the new lawsuit after the Pentagon failed to respond to a Freedom of Information Act request for documents that would help identify the more than 750 past and current detainees.

The request, submitted Jan. 18, was necessary to obtain information critical to the AP's ability to interpret transcripts of proceedings involving some detainees that were provided by the Department of Defense, the lawsuit said.

The public has "an intense and legitimate interest" in learning the detainees' identities, but the Department of Defense has been unable or unwilling to state when or if it will provide the requested identifying information, the AP said.

Heather Tasker, a spokeswoman for the Manhattan U.S. attorney's office, which must respond to the lawsuit, said Monday the government had no immediate comment.

In February, Judge Jed S. Rakoff ordered the military to turn over uncensored copies of transcripts and other documents from 317 military hearings for detainees at the prison camp. The Department of Defense said no transcripts exist of the hearings for another 241 detainees who refused to participate in the Combatant Status Review Tribunals.

U.S. authorities hold about 490 prisoners at Guantanamo on suspicion of links to al-Qaida or the Taliban. Most were held without charges since the detention center opened four years ago, prompting human rights groups to complain.

The Department of Defense earlier released transcripts to the AP in response to a similar lawsuit, but the names and other details of detainees were blacked out, prompting the judge to order the names released.

The judge hasn't ruled whether the government must release uncensored transcripts from a second round of hearings to decide whether detainees still are threats to the United States.