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UK Must Intervene In Guantanamo Bay Hunger Strike-Amnesty

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LONDON --The U.K. government must intervene to resolve a hunger strike by detainees at Guantanamo Bay, two human rights groups said Thursday.

Amnesty International and Reprieve said at least six U.K. residents were among what it estimated were 210 detainees currently refusing food at the U.S. military base in Cuba. The detainees are protesting against their detention without charge or trial.

The U.S. disputes the figures. It said Friday that only 29 detainees remain on hunger strike, down from a high of 131 in mid-September. It said 16 detainees are being force-fed at the prison hospital.

The two human rights groups have written to Prime Minister Tony Blair urging him to persuade U.S. authorities to allow independent observers access to all hunger strikers.

"Reports emerging from the camp concerning the treatment of hunger strikers are disturbing and just underline the need for an immediate resolution of Guantanamo Bay," Amnesty International's director Kate Allen told a news conference in London.

"The camp is still closed to Amnesty International and the secrecy surrounding Guantanamo makes the hunger strike a frightening phenomenon."

"We need to see the U.K. government intervening to prevent deaths and injuries and to see that all detainees - including at least six U.K. residents on hunger strike - are either properly tried or immediately released in accordance with international human rights law."

Reprieve's legal director, Clive Stafford Smith, a lawyer who acts for 40 Guantanamo Bay detainees, told the news conference that conditions at the prison "at the best of times are disturbing."

"But to imagine my clients being held in four-point restraints with a tube forced down their noses, after all that they have been through, just makes me sick," he said.

Of the U.K. residents at Camp Delta, five have been officially identified as Omar Deghayes, Bisher al-Rawi, Jamil al-Banna, Jamal Abdullah and Shaker Aamer.

Nine U.K. nationals originally detained at Guantanamo have now returned home.