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## **U.S. Denies Guantanamo Bay Prison Abuse**

Associated Press  
September 2, 2005

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) - The U.S. military says only 76 detainees are refusing food at the prison for terror suspects in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, disputing lawyers allegations that nearly half the 500-plus prisoners are on a hunger strike.

A military spokesman also denied charges that they have been beating up and otherwise abusing prisoners.

Some detainees have been fasting since Aug. 8 and nine have been hospitalized, but are in stable condition, Army Col. Brad Blackner, told The Associated Press.

``We continue to monitor them 24 hours a day. We continue to offer them water and food," Blackner said Thursday in an e-mail. ``The number (of prisoners on hunger strike) is nowhere near 200."

Most of some 500 detainees from more than 40 countries have been held more than 3 years without charge or access to lawyers. One of the demands of the strikers is that they be charged and brought to trial, or freed. Most were captured in the Afghanistan war, suspected of ties to al-Qaida or the ousted Taliban regime that sheltered the terrorist network.

The military's account conflicted with Wednesday's report from the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights that 210 prisoners were refusing food and that some are threatening to starve to death unless they are put on trial or released.

The detainees are angry because the U.S. military allegedly reneged on promises to bring the prison into compliance with Geneva Conventions if detainees ended a June-July hunger strike that involved up to 200 of the 500-plus men from some 40 countries held at the base, the center said.

After news of that hunger strike came from a freed detainee, the military said only 52 prisoners were not eating.

Blackner also denied the center's claim that at least three detainees were abused by the military's Extreme Reaction Force. Lawyers from the center said an interrogator threw a mini-refrigerator and a chair at detainee Hisham Sliti on Aug. 5. Military police then beat him up, the center said.

``If the events ... actually happened I would know about it and I haven't heard anything about 'beating' or 'abusing' or throwing of a refrigerator," Blackner said.

Lawyers accuse the military of lying to and about the detainees.

The strike is the result of prisoners ``who have grown desperate after more than three years of constant deceit. The military has lied to the prisoners over, and over, and over again," said Clive Stafford Smith, a British lawyer representing several detainees, including Sliti.

He said that during a visit to the detention camp Aug. 4-14, he was not permitted to meet Sliti.

In another statement Thursday, the Center for Constitutional Rights said the Department of Defense ``has continued to resist the efforts of counsel to meet promptly with their clients participating in the hunger strike."

Blackner denied there was a practice of denying lawyers access. ``If someone was refused a visit it was simply due to the fact that we can only accommodate a certain number of visitors per week," he said.