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## **Vt. Lawyers Represent Guantanamo Detainees**

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BURLINGTON , Vt. --Bob Rachlin first heard from Djamel Ameziane when he got a postcard in early 2005. The note from the 38-year-old Algerian was in French, which Rachlin speaks. Ameziane said he wanted a lawyer.

Ameziane is one of 490 people deemed enemy combatants whom the U.S. government is holding in a military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Rachlin, 69, senior director at Vermont's largest law firm, has spent much of his career representing business clients. His firm's offices in downtown Burlington have spectacular views of Lake Champlain.

Rachlin and two St. Johnsbury lawyers -- David Sleight and Robert Gensburg -- joined a national group of lawyers who have volunteered to represent people the Bush administration has labeled "the worst of the worst."

"This is not a question of whether they deserve a lawyer," he said. "This is a question of whether the system should be allowed to function." By protecting the integrity of the justice system, "We're protecting our fellow citizens, as well as these people."

Court papers filed by the government say Ameziane stayed with Taliban fighters in Kabul, Afghanistan and illegally traveled with them into Pakistan. But he has not been formally charged with any crime.

Rachlin has replied in his own court filings that his client does not belong to al-Qaida or the Taliban, and was swept up as he tried to leave a country torn by war.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2004 that the Guantanamo detainees are entitled to legal representation and can challenge their detention.

The New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights began recruiting volunteer lawyers. Rachlin said he got an e-mail about the effort in late 2004 and agreed to participate.

Sleight said he joined the effort because of what he saw as an affront to the due process guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution.

"It's fundamentally contrary to what we aspire to be as a country," Sleight said. "This is one of the reasons I'm a lawyer."

Rachlin said he had been to Guantanamo four times and expects to return this month. He had to have an extensive FBI background check before being allowed on the base. When he wants to view his client's file, he has to travel to a secure government site near Washington.

During visits with his lawyer at Guantanamo, Ameziane's hands were free but his legs were chained to the floor, Rachlin said.

"He would describe incidents of maltreatment he had received," Rachlin said. "Incidents of beatings. He's talked about having the Quran thrown around, or being kept in cold conditions or with lights on so he couldn't sleep, or being punished for meeting with his lawyer -- me."

