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Ex-Guantanamo Inmate Describes Inhumane Conditions and Abuse

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PARIS -- A Briton released from the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay told Europe's top human rights body Friday that he was beaten, shackled, kept in a cramped cage and fed rotten food as part of "systematic abuse" in U.S. custody.

Jamal al-Harith's testimony before a Council of Europe panel came as part of an inquiry by the body into human rights abuses at the U.S. detention facility to be made public in a report due out early next year.

Reading from a 10-page statement, Al-Harith described his two-year detention at Guantanamo Bay as a period of continual mistreatment that ranged from humiliation and 15-hour interrogations to physical abuse that he says left scars.

At one point, Al-Harith said he refused to take an unidentified injection and was chained up and attacked by five men wearing helmets, body armor and shields.

"They jumped on my legs and back and they kicked and punched me," said the 37-year-old Web site designer and father of three from Manchester, England. "Then I was put in isolation for a month."

Al-Harith said he was kept mostly in a wire cage and given food marked "10 to 12 years beyond their usable date" as well as "black and rotten" fruit. Detained in Afghanistan in October 2001, Al-Harith maintains he had traveled to the region to attend a religious retreat in Pakistan.

He and three other Britons were released in March and have filed a lawsuit in a U.S. court seeking \$10 million each in damages. They were denied access to lawyers, as are most prisoners in Guantanamo.

When Al-Harith and the others filed their lawsuits in October, the Pentagon denied the abuse allegations and said the men were properly held in Guantanamo after being captured in Afghanistan and having fought for Al-Qaida.

Al-Harith said that during long interrogations, he was given no choice but to urinate on the floor and repeatedly threatened or asked to confess to crimes he had not committed in exchange for a payoff.

He said he was placed in shackles that prevented him from standing upright and that cut into his flesh, leaving scars on his wrists and ankles.

Interrogators threatened to seize his family's home unless he admitted to having gone to Pakistan to buy drugs or to become involved with terrorism, Al-Harith said.