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## **Freedom a Long Way Off for Some Detainees**

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**GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba** - Dragging shackles to makeshift courtrooms, dozens of terrorism suspects are being considered for possible release from this U.S. military outpost.

But freedom appears a long way off. Many prisoners are being transferred to jails in other countries where torture is common, critics say.

### **High intelligence value**

Set up to extract information from suspected terrorists, the Guantanamo mission has the United States confronting multiplying criticism over the detention of people for nearly three years without trial and questions about what more it can gain from continuing to hold them.

Some 30 percent of the 550 remaining prisoners are considered to be of high intelligence value now, said Steve Rodriguez, the civilian in charge of interrogations and intelligence. Military trials have been scheduled for only four detainees.

About three dozen men already have been freed, while around 160 have been sent to other countries where they are being jailed, watched or interrogated.

"According to the Department of Defense, prisoners have been removed from Guantanamo to face further detention in Pakistan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia despite the fact that the torture of detainees is common in these countries," said Jumana Musa of Amnesty International.

Others can expect to be transferred, said the general in charge of the camp, adding that he would not apologize for holding people who planned on harming Americans or their families.

"We did not bring hundreds of innocent civilians off the battlefield," Army Brig. Gen. Jay Hood said. "If you listen to every story I think you'll hear a common drumbeat of this person who tells you he was a rug merchant or what not. I think it's all part of a deliberate effort to mislead and to deceive."

### **A right to challenge**

All the prisoners are accused of ties to the al-Qaida terrorist network or the ousted Taliban regime that harbored Osama bin Laden and his followers in Afghanistan. Defense lawyers contend those links aren't strong enough to withstand challenges awaiting in federal courts.

The Supreme Court ruled in June that prisoners held at this Navy base on the eastern tip of Cuba have a right to challenge their detentions in U.S. courts. The Defense Department hastily set up review tribunals to evaluate whether they had rightly been detained as enemy combatants, a classification with fewer legal protections than prisoners of war.

Among dozens of cases rushed before the tribunals - where lawyers are barred from participating - only one man has been released.

As the only independent group allowed to visit prisoners, the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross, issued a rare public rebuke last year raising concerns over the prolonged detentions.

"Certainly some of the steps being taken address issues we've raised, and the United States is addressing other areas we brought to its attention," said Geoff Loane, the regional Red Cross representative. "But it will take some time to see what the impact of these tribunals and administrative reviews will have."

### **Mental health concerns**

There have been 34 suicide attempts at Guantanamo, and though there has not been one since January, the prisoners' mental health continues to be a concern.

"I've interviewed the people who have been released and they are not balanced people now," said Massoud Shadjareh, chairman of the London-based Islamic Human Rights Commission. "They're not able to function as they were before."

One detainee who tried to commit suicide last year and was in a coma for several weeks still requires physical therapy, and lawyers for some of those released are suing the United States for damages.

About 5 percent of detainees are taking anti-depressants or other psychotropic medication and may need to be evaluated by a forensic psychiatrist, said Navy Cmdr. Steve Edmundson, a surgeon in charge of the detainees' health.

"Basically, their medical health has steadily improved," Edmundson said. "Their mental health I think has also improved a great deal."

There are reports of mistreatment at Guantanamo, although not as severe as the abuses alleged at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison.

"We don't torture people," Rodriguez said. "The only tool we have is time."