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Detainees' Lawyer Seeks Hearing on Guantanamo Hunger Strike

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WASHINGTON -- A lawyer for 11 Kuwaiti detainees at Guantanamo Bay asked a federal judge yesterday to hold a fact-finding hearing about a five-week hunger strike at the military prison, saying the health of detainees is increasingly dire.

Lawyer Tom Wilner, who visited the base last week, said his clients described a deteriorating health crisis at the US Navy base in Cuba. Many of the 500 prisoners there have stopped eating to protest their continued detention without trial, he said.

But a military spokesman at the base said yesterday that the number of detainees participating in the strike had fallen sharply. The spokesman said 36 detainees are refusing meals, of whom 16 are being force-fed intravenously in a prison hospital. A week ago the military said 105 detainees were not eating.

Wilner said he was skeptical of the government's assertions. He accused the military of undercounting the number of participants, saying he had been told before his trip that three of his clients were on hunger strike. In fact, he said, five were.

In a court filing that was declassified yesterday, Wilner asked a federal judge to hold an emergency hearing to find out more about the detainees "who are starving themselves to death."

He also asked the judge to order the government to provide regular medical reports about his clients and to allow family members to communicate directly with them.

The judge, Colleen Kollar-Kotelly of the district court in Washington, is expected to rule on Wilner's petition early next week.

Guantanamo detainees staged a widespread hunger strike in July. Prison authorities brought that strike to an end by promising that the prisoners would receive better treatment.

But the strike started again on Aug. 8, the military has said. Several lawyers for detainees said their clients told them it was restarted following an alleged incident in which a Kuwaiti prisoner, Fawzi al-Odah, was violently pulled from his cell after he refused to walk to an interrogation.

Wilner, who met with Odah last week, said his client had bruises on his body from the alleged incident. He said Odah told him he had refused to go to the interrogation because, during a previous interrogation, he had been chained down and forced to urinate on himself. The military did not respond to a request for comment.