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Guantanamo Detainees Allege Abuse

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Tom Wilner is a lawyer who represents the 11 Kuwaitis being held at Guantanamo Bay. He told reporters in a telephone news conference that the Kuwaitis were beaten soon after their capture in Afghanistan and Pakistan before they were transferred to the U.S. Naval Base in Cuba.

Mr. Wilner also says that several of them falsely confessed to being members of the Taleban regime in Afghanistan.

"Each of them has, during custody, been treated really terribly and physically abused," Mr. Wilner says. "All of them were hung from their wrists and beaten, sometimes beaten with chains. At least one was hung upside down from his ankles and beaten. They were all beaten, they said, until they would pass out."

Mr. Wilner spoke to reporters only after his notes from recent meetings with the detainees were declassified by the U.S. government, which also gave him permission to discuss their cases.

Human-rights groups have long expressed concern about the treatment of the more than 500 detainees at Guantanamo Bay, many of whom have been held there for more than three years.

Defense Department officials have denied the use of torture on the detainees and say all credible abuse allegations will be investigated. U.S. Air Force Major Michael Shavers is a spokesman at the Pentagon.

"U.S. policy condemns and prohibits torture," Major Shavers says. "U.S. personnel are required to follow this policy and applicable law. The U.S. policy requires that all detainees are treated humanely."

Major Shavers also says al-Qaida training manuals recovered in Afghanistan encourage false allegations of abuse.

"I think it is important to note that al-Qaida training manuals emphasize the tactic of making false abuse allegations," Major Shavers says. "So, the fact that these detainees are now making allegations of abuse seem to fit the standard operating procedure in those training manuals."

Attorney Tom Wilner says the physical abuse of the 11 Kuwaiti detainees he represents has now stopped. But he says there has been a switch to what he calls mental torture that includes the use of bright lights in the cells, little exercise and very limited access to reading material.

Khalid Al-Odah also took part in the news conference. He has organized a group in Kuwait City to press for the release of the Kuwaiti detainees that include his son, Fawzi.

He made a direct appeal to President Bush for the government to either charge the detainees with a crime or release them.

"Mr. President, please end this unspeakable suffering. And please, Mr. President, if you do not have anything against them, please set them free," Mr. Al-Odah says.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled last June that foreigners detained as enemy combatants at Guantanamo Bay could challenge their confinement in U.S. courts.

The Bush administration contends that the detainees have adequate rights to challenge their incarceration through special military reviews established by the Defense Department. Two recent federal court judges issued contradictory rulings on the issue, one siding with the government and the other with attorneys representing the detainees.