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## Hunger Strikers Pledge to Die in Guantanamo

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More than 200 detainees in Guantánamo Bay are in their fifth week of a hunger strike, the Guardian has been told.

Statements from prisoners in the camp which were declassified by the US government on Wednesday reveal that the men are starving themselves in protest at the conditions in the camp and at their alleged maltreatment - including desecration of the Qur'an - by American guards.

The statements, written on August 11, have just been given to the British human rights lawyer Clive Stafford Smith. They show that prisoners are determined to starve themselves to death. In one, Binyam Mohammed, a former London schoolboy, said: "I do not plan to stop until I either die or we are respected.

"People will definitely die. Bobby Sands petitioned the British government to stop the illegitimate internment of Irishmen without trial. He had the courage of his convictions and he starved himself to death. Nobody should believe for one moment that my brothers here have less courage."

Yesterday, Mr Stafford Smith, who represents 40 detainees at Guantánamo Bay, eight of whom are British residents, said many men had been starving themselves for more than four weeks and the situation was becoming desperate.

He said: "I am worried about the lives of my guys because they are a pretty obstinate lot and they are going to go through with this and I think they are going to end up killing themselves. The American military doesn't want anyone to know about this."

He pointed to an American army claim that only 76 prisoners at the base were refusing food, saying that they were attempting to play down what could be a political scandal if a prisoner were to die.

The hunger strike is the second since late June. The first ended after the authorities made a number of promises, including better access to books, and bottled drinking water.

The men claim that they were tricked into eating again.

In his statement, Mr Mohammed described how during the first strike men were placed on intravenous drips after refusing food for 20 days.

He said: "The administration promised that if we gave them 10 days, they would bring the prison into compliance with the Geneva conventions. They said this had been approved by Donald Rumsfeld himself in Washington DC. As a result of these promises, we agreed to end the strike on July 28.

"It is now August 11. They have betrayed our trust (again). Hisham from Tunisia was savagely beaten in his interrogation and they publicly desecrated the Qur'an (again). Saad from Kuwait was ERF'd [visited by the Extreme Reaction Force] for refusing to go (again) to interrogation

because the female interrogator had sexually humiliated him (again) for 5 hours \_ Therefore, the strike must begin again."

In another declassified statement, Omar Deghayes, from Brighton, said: "In July, some people took no water for many days. I was part of the strike and I am again this time. Some people were taken to hospital, and put on drip feeds, but they pulled the needles out, as they preferred to die. There were two doctors. One wanted to force feed the men, but they got legal advice saying that they could not if the men refused.

"In the end the military agreed to negotiate. We came off the strike [on July 28 2005], but we gave them two weeks, and if the changes were not implemented we would go back on strike."

Yesterday, Mr Deghayes's brother, Abubaker, pleaded with the British government to intervene on his brother's behalf. "I'm really worried. Something really needs to be done. We can't just allow people to be oppressed and tortured," he said.

Another prisoner, Jamal Kiyemba, from Battersea, south London, said in an account of the July hunger strike: "Many of the prisoners collapsed, as they would not drink water. More than 30 were hospitalised. I am in Camp IV and we joined in."

He added: "Eventually, because people were near death, the military caved and let us set up a prisoner welfare council of six prisoners."

Jamil el Banna, another British resident, described how the guards were again searching the Qur'an by hand, which they had agreed to stop.

Yesterday, representatives of George Bush's government appeared before the US court of appeal to stop legal bids on behalf of dozens of Guantánamo Bay detainees, who say they are not being afforded an opportunity to challenge their status as enemy combatants.

The Pentagon says it is holding 505 prisoners at Guantánamo Bay.

Most were captured in Afghanistan following the US invasion in October 2001 and many have been there since January 2002.

Last night a Pentagon spokesman denied that there were more than 200 hunger strikers: "There are 76 detainees doing a voluntary fast at present. There are nine detainees in hospital as a result of their hunger strike.

"They are listed as being in a stable condition and they are receiving nutrition."

Asked if they were being force fed, he said: "They are being held in the same standards as US prison standards... they don't allow people to kill themselves via starvation."