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Lawyers Want US Evidence of Gitmo Returnees Trashed

Kuwait Times
April 10, 2006

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti lawyers demanded yesterday that transcripts of interrogations of five former inmates of Guantanamo prison by US officers should not be admissible as evidence in a trial underway in Kuwait. "The transcripts do not bear signatures of the US officers nor the defendants and thus should not be admissible as legal evidence by the court," defence lawyer Ayedh Al-Azemi told the court. The men are accused of fighting against US forces in Afghanistan under the former Taleban regime, for which they face a minimum of three years in jail.

Defence lawyers argue that the five committed no crime in Kuwait and had not violated the state's laws. Azemi told reporters that the transcripts of the US interrogation, on which the Kuwaiti case was based, were "not a proper investigation" but "simple reports that included neither questions nor answers." Judge Hmoud Al-Mutawa made no ruling on the issue during yesterday's brief session and is expected to make his views known only when delivering a verdict.

The five men were repatriated to Kuwait on November 4 after spending almost four years in Guantanamo prison in Cuba, created after the US invasion of Afghanistan amid outrage from civil liberty defenders and human rights groups. The former prisoners are Abdulaziz Al-Shimmari, who went on a two-month hunger strike before his release from Guantanamo, Adel Al-Zamel, Mohammad Al-Deehani, Saad Al-Azemi and Abdullah Al-Ajmi. They were released on a 500-dinar (\$1,700) bail each at the start of the trial on March 5, but Zamel was kept in jail to serve a one-year term for another offence.

A sixth Kuwaiti, Nasser Al-Mutairi, was released in January last year while six more Kuwaitis are still detained in Guantanamo. Mutairi was acquitted by the criminal court but was later handed a five-year term by the appeals court. The Kuwaiti police officer who interrogated the men in Kuwait failed to appear in court yesterday to be cross-examined by lawyers. The judge ordered him to appear at the next hearing set for May 7. Another defence lawyer Mubarak Shimmari told AFP last month that four of the defendants said they were captured in Pakistan by bounty hunters and handed to US authorities in exchange for money.

They also denied any links with the former Taleban regime or the Al-Qaeda network and said they were there either on charity work or for business, he said. A total of 490 people are currently detained at **Guantanamo Bay**, a naval base in Cuba where the United States has held and interrogated 750 detainees since early 2002. - AFP