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## Hunger Strike

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**Intro:** In early August, a group of detainees at the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, began a hunger strike. Slowly, the strike spread throughout the various camps housing more than 500 prisoners. Now, more than five weeks later, scores of Guantanamo detainees are refusing food and water. And the military leaders on the base have no clear plan how to stop others from joining. NPR's National Security Correspondent, Jackie Northam, reports.

**Northam:** Two weeks ago, Scott Sullivan, a New York lawyer, made one of his regular visits to Guantanamo Bay to see his clients - 11 Yemeni men who have been held at the base for more than three years. At THAT time, five of Sullivan's clients were on a hunger strike. Sullivan was shocked at what he called their emaciated appearance...one Yemeni man in particular.

**Sullivan:** he had been on hunger strike for 22 days and the day we met with him was the first day he was going to begin going without fluids.

**Northam:** Two weeks later, Sullivan says he has no idea how that detainee is doing. Or how his other clients - also on a hunger strike - are faring. Sullivan says the government will not share details about the prisoners conditions - the attorneys have to visit the remote base to see for themselves. But the military is sharing the numbers involved: last Friday, 82 prisoners were on a hunger strike. Capt John Adams, the officer in charge of media relations at Guantanamo, says that number has gone up to 128.

**Adams:** out of which 18 are currently in the detention hospital...15 are being fed...through feeding tubes through their...nose. And also we have three others that are being hydrated intravenously.

**Northam:** That means, by official figures, about one quarter of the detainees at Guantanamo are refusing to voluntarily eat or take water. Sullivan says the strikes are being organized by a group of detainees...to keep pressure on the government.

**Sullivan:** the way the hunger strike is structured, is that it's different people join at different times and then people stop taking fluids at different times. we have client who was going to hunger striking on sept 6 and then another client who informed us he was going to stop taking water on sept 9th.

**Northam:** This is the second major hunger strike in recent months - another that started in June lasted six weeks. Sullivan says at that time, the prisoners were protesting against the CONDITIONS at the camp, which they allege included beatings by military personnel. Sullivan says the detainees were angry when the military allegedly reneged on promises it had made to end that strike. Sullivan says THIS protest has to do with the anger and frustration the prisoners face over their open-ended detentions. Most of them have been held for more than 3 years...only a handful have been charged. The Pentagon says it has set up processes to ensure that no detainee stays longer than necessary. Capt Adams says the stalemate is discussed almost daily.

**Adams:** There are meetings with military folks from all of the different agencies...to try to combat the hunger strike, to try to make it go away. Bottom line, we are trying to do whatever we can to have the detainees begin to eat again.

**Northam:** Military officials say they will NOT let any of the prisoners die - they will continue to be hospitalized to make sure they get nutrients. The small detainees hospital only holds 20 beds. Adams says, if necessary, prisoners will be taken to a nearby naval hospital. Jackie Northam, NPR News, Washington