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Red Cross President Plans Visit to Washington on Question of Detainees' Treatment

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WASHINGTON - Officials of the International Committee of the Red Cross said Tuesday that the organization's president, M. Jakob Kellenberger, was hoping to visit Washington soon to press senior Bush administration officials about the treatment of detainees at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

Committee officials in Washington, and at the organization's headquarters in Geneva, said that Mr. Kellenberger had made visits to Washington before. But it was clear that any coming visit would be used to raise at a high level the issues contained in a Red Cross report charging that the American military had used psychological and physical coercion on detainees that was "tantamount to torture."

A report in The New York Times on Tuesday said the International Committee of the Red Cross made the charges after a visit in June by a team of relief workers that included medical personnel. A memorandum based on the report and obtained by The Times said the Red Cross believed that doctors and other medical personnel at Guantánamo were assisting in the planning of interrogations in what was described as "a flagrant violation of medical ethics."

The Pentagon on Tuesday denied that its forces at Guantánamo engaged in torture and said the detainees there, who now number about 550, were treated humanely.

Gen. Richard B. Myers, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a news conference in Indianapolis on Tuesday, dismissed accusations that the tactics amounted to torture.

"We certainly don't think it's torture," General Myers said before delivering a speech to the Economic Club of Indianapolis, according to the Web site of The Indianapolis Star. "Let's not forget the kind of people we have down there," he said. "These are the people that don't know any moral values."

The State Department appeared to take a more conciliatory approach to the Red Cross report.

"We take their reports very, very seriously," Richard Boucher, the department spokesman, told reporters on Tuesday. Mr. Boucher declined to comment on the specifics raised in the report but said, "We value very much things they raise for us in their reports."

The report of the June visit was the first in which the Red Cross, which has been visiting Guantánamo since January 2002, used the word "torture" directly to describe its views of the detention and interrogation system there.

Under its agreement with the United States government, the Red Cross is allowed access to the detention facilities at Guantánamo and may interview each detainee. In exchange, the Red Cross agrees that it will not make public any criticisms but will relay them only to the government.

The Red Cross operates in Guantánamo from a double-wide trailer just outside the barbed wire and fence of Camp Delta, the main detention facility there. The inspection teams are composed of several people. They usually remain there for four or five weeks at a time, then take a month off, committee officials have said. Detainees are interviewed with a translator provided by the Red Cross away from any military personnel.

The medical personnel on the Red Cross inspection team also view the medical facilities and interview military medical personnel. The report said that sometimes "outside doctors" are brought in to help interrogators plan their strategy of interviewing detainees.

It also said that psychologists and psychological workers in a group called the Behavioral Science Consultation Team, known as Biscuit, were advising interrogators.