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Guantanamo Bay Conditions Have Improved: Red Cross

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GENEVA (Reuters) - Detainees are enjoying better treatment at the U.S. prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, and the Red Cross is satisfied with its access to them, the humanitarian agency's chief said on Tuesday.

Jakob Kellenberger, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), said detention conditions at Guantanamo had "improved considerably" over the past four years.

"There have also been improvements in the treatment of prisoners, but that does not mean that there are no longer any problems at all," he told the daily Tribune de Geneve in an interview.

The Pentagon last week released the names and nationalities of 558 terrorism suspects held at the U.S. naval base in Cuba.

Kellenberger said the ICRC, whose work is based on the principle of confidentiality, has known the identities of those held there since the beginning of 2002. It had been able to visit the detainees regularly under satisfactory conditions.

But he said the ICRC and Washington remained at odds over whether the detainees, which the United States calls "enemy combatants", are protected under the 1949 Geneva Convention on the rights of prisoners of war.

"On this issue, I don't see a possible agreement at this stage. But we are not abandoning our efforts," he said.

He called it "extremely regrettable" that intense media focus on Guantanamo seemed to distract from troubled sites in places like Chechnya and Myanmar, where the ICRC has suspended prison visits over disagreements with local authorities.

ICRC officials visit more than 500,000 detainees worldwide each year. In 2005, Kellenberger said it sent staff to nearly 2,600 detention centers in 76 countries.