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U.S. Activists Questioned Over Guantanamo Trip

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WASHINGTON, Feb 7 (Reuters) - A group of American Catholic activists, who staged a protest outside the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba in December, said on Tuesday they had been warned by a government agency that they might face penalties for breaking the U.S. travel ban to Cuba.

The group of 24 activists from Witness Against Torture, included a priest and a 79-year-old nun who marched 50 miles (82 km) to the Guantanamo base to protest against the treatment of foreign terrorism suspects held there.

They prayed and fasted for four days outside the base while trying, unsuccessfully, to visit detainees.

After the protest, one of the organizers received a letter from the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, which administers Washington's trade embargo against Cuba.

The letter, seen by Reuters, requested an explanation for the activists' trip and warned there could be civilian or criminal penalties for breaking the rules on travel to Cuba. These include up to 10 years imprisonment or a \$250,000 fine.

The group wrote back to OFAC saying "we decided to accept President (George W.) Bush's June 20, 2005 invitation that those concerned about conditions at Guantanamo are 'welcome to go down there ... and take a look at the conditions.'"

A spokeswoman for the U.S. Treasury declined to comment on the matter.

It was the first demonstration allowed by Communist Cuba near the U.S. military enclave, where around 500 suspected members of Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters have been held for more than three years, almost all of them without trial.