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ICRC In Touch with U.S. on Guantanamo Hunger Strike

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GENEVA, Sept 2 - The International Committee of the Red Cross said on Friday it had been in touch with U.S. officials over reports that foreign terrorism suspects at the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay have begun a hunger strike.

ICRC spokesman Florian Westphal said ICRC officials were to make a previously scheduled regular visit to the naval base in eastern Cuba, which holds some 505 prisoners, in "about a week".

The New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights, which represents some of the detainees held at Guantanamo, said on Wednesday some prisoners had begun a new hunger strike to protest against their conditions of detention.

"This has come up in our regular contacts with the U.S. administration but is also something we are closely following," Westphal told Reuters.

Asked whether the Geneva-based humanitarian agency was concerned about the hunger strike, he replied: "We are trying to get a clearer picture of what is going on."

ICRC officials conduct lengthy prison visits at the facility every two to three months, but return in between so as to speed exchanges of messages to and from detainees and their families.

ICRC findings and their recommendations to detaining authorities remain confidential in keeping with its tradition of neutrality during armed conflicts.

Human rights groups and United Nations experts have expressed concern that the detainees -- accused of having links to Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime or the al Qaeda network -- have been held for years without charges being laid.