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Five Kuwaitis Head Home from Guantanamo

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KUWAIT, Nov 3 (Reuters) - Five Kuwaitis who had been held in Guantanamo Bay for three years were flying home where they will be tried in a local court, a representative of the detainees said on Thursday.

The five were among a dozen Kuwaitis imprisoned at the U.S. military base in Cuba during the 2001 U.S.-led war to oust al Qaeda from Afghanistan after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Khaled al-Odah, Chairman of the Families of Kuwaiti Detainees at Guantanamo, said two of the five prisoners were in very bad health, adding that they were expected to arrive in Kuwait late on Thursday or early Friday.

They were identified as Adel al-Zamel, Mohammad al-Daihani, Abdullah al-Ajmi, Saad al-Azmi and Abdulaziz al-Shimmari.

"Shimmari is a walking skeleton and Ajmi is suffering a nervous breakdown due to his imprisonment. He has been shouting and out of control," Odah told Reuters.

Shimmari was among five Kuwaitis who joined a recent hunger strike by 200 inmates to protest their prolonged confinement without trial.

The official news agency KUNA said Kuwaiti authorities received the five on Thursday and that they were expected to be tried in a Kuwaiti court.

They are flying home on a plane sent by the government carrying medical and security teams, Odah said.

Interior Ministry sources said the detainees would be allowed to meet their families before being taken into custody, but Odah said relatives were yet to receive approval for access.

One former detainee Nasser al-Mutairi was freed last January but was later tried and acquitted of charges of undermining Kuwaiti security, weapons possession, joining al-Qaeda and fighting a friendly nation, a reference to the United States.

But on Wednesday, a Kuwaiti appeals court sentenced Mutairi, 28, to five years in prison for "participating in hostile activities against a friendly country", and offences ranging from weapons possession to hurting Kuwait's interests.

Odah said Kuwait would soon hold talks with U.S. officials about freeing the remaining six Kuwaitis held at Guantanamo.

They include his son Fawzi, 27, a religious studies teacher arrested in Pakistan near the Afghan border in late 2001.

Kuwait, a staunch U.S. ally, is a main transit route for American forces going to Iraq. It was a launchpad for the 2003 war on Iraq and up to 25,000 U.S. troops are based there. (Additional reporting by Yara Bayoumy in Dubai)

