

The following text may be printed, copy/pasted, or downloaded and emailed.

Russians sue U.S. government for torturing them at Guantanamo camp

Associated Press
February 4, 2005

MOSCOW - Several Russian citizens who alleged they were tortured while being held at the U.S. navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, said they plan to sue the U.S. government in interviews published Friday.

Timur Ishmuradov, who said he was detained by Taliban forces in Afghanistan in the summer of 2001, charged the U.S. government allowed prison officials at Guantanamo to systematically torture him, Izvestia newspaper reported.

"I am very angry at Americans for what they did to me - I have traces of their tortures on my body," Ishmuradov told Izvestia.

"I have scars on my back after being dragged on the ground," he said.

"They would beat me during interrogations and also while taking me from one place to another."

Foreigners from about 40 different countries have been held at the Guantanamo Bay base - some for more than three years - without being charged with any crimes. They were mainly swept up in the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan.

U.S. authorities said they have treated the Guantanamo prisoners consistent with the Geneva Conventions, although they said the accords do not apply to the detainees, claiming they are "enemy combatants," as opposed to prisoners of war.

Ishmuradov and six other Russian citizens were returned to Russia last March. An eighth Russian man, Ravil Mingazov, remains at Guantanamo, Izvestia said. The seven were held at a pretrial detention centre in southern Russia, then released in June. All were seized in Afghanistan by U.S. forces on suspicion of fighting for the Taliban.

Airat Vakhitov, 29, said he lost 66 pounds during his first several months in Guantanamo. He recalled prisoners were forced to change cells every 15 minutes and deprived of sleep, Izvestia reported.

When violating prison rules, detainees were beaten and prison guards also used tear gas against them, Vakhitov told the newspaper. When prisoners were praying, guards would hit them, forcing the men to take their clothes off, he said.

Vakhitov said he continues to be harassed by Russian law-enforcement officials and cannot find a job. He said he plans to sue the U.S. government.

"I think I will follow Airat's example and take U.S. authorities to court," former Guantanamo detainee Ravil Gumarov, 42, of Tajikistan, was quoted saying by Izvestia.

"Nobody wants to hire me now."

Meanwhile, in Geneva, Switzerland, UN human rights experts expressed concern Friday about possible "irreversible psychiatric symptoms" developing among prisoners entering a fourth year of virtual solitary confinement at Guantanamo.

The experts on arbitrary detention noted allegations detainees at Guantanamo may be subject to "inhuman and degrading treatment."

Human rights officials have expressed concern about the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo.

A secret report obtained by The Associated Press found guards punched some detainees, tied one to a gurney for questioning and forced a dozen to strip from the waist down. One squad of guards was all-female, traumatizing some Muslim prisoners, said the report that summarized what investigators saw when they viewed 20 hours of videotapes of the squads.

"The conditions of detention, especially of those in solitary confinement, place the detainees at significant risk of psychiatric deterioration, possibly including the development of irreversible psychiatric symptoms," the UN experts said in a statement.