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## **Gitmo's Cold Comfort**

Editorial  
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To hear U.S. Attorney-General Alberto Gonzales tell it, Washington is running a sunny Club Med for terrorists at the American naval station at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

The 500 or so captives at Guantanamo, including Canadian Omar Khadr, have "unprecedented legal protection," three square meals a day, "state of the art" medical care and plenty of other amenities, Gonzales assured a British conference earlier this week. "We are aware of no other nation in history that has afforded such protection for enemy combatants," he said.

Maybe officials in Washington should look a little harder.

As the New York Times has reported, the nasty reality is that Guantanamo is a place where a Pakistani chicken farmer named Abdur Sayed Rahman was held because his name sounded like that of an Afghan suspect, Abdur Zahid Rahman. Oops.

There is no denying that the United States is holding Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters, bomb-makers and other criminals at Guantanamo.

But the detention centre has been up and running for five years. Gonzales' legal teams have had ample time to marshal a legal case against them. The U.S. military has had time to squeeze them for information. The detainees should either be put on trial before a credible court or set free. And the camp should be closed.

That was the recommendation of United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan and of UN Human Rights Commissioner Louise Arbour, a former justice of Canada's Supreme Court.

A UN panel described the camp as an unlawful holding tank where prisoners are being held for years as their basic rights are denied, where they can be hauled before military tribunals so partisan that the U.S. Supreme Court is hearing a challenge to their constitutionality, and where prisoners are routinely abused.

The panel cited the use of dogs, exposure to extreme temperatures, sleep deprivation and prolonged isolation, noting that "the simultaneous use of these techniques is even more likely to amount to torture."

American officials rejected the report, pointing out that the UN panel never visited the camp. That was because U.S. officials refused to let them interview detainees privately. They were forced to rely on information from U.S. officials, freed detainees, lawyers and other sources.

Given what the world knows about Guantanamo, Gonzales's defence of conditions there is an embarrassment. If U.S. officials are so proud of the place, why not let the UN and human rights advocates speak directly to the lucky detainees?