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U.S. forces accused of abusing Kuwaiti prisoners

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WASHINGTON - U.S. forces abused several Kuwaiti prisoners now held at Guantanamo Bay by beating them with chains, sodomising them and giving them electrical shocks, the detainees' lawyer says.

Human rights lawyer Tom Wilner, who represents the 11 Kuwaitis locked up as foreign terrorism suspects at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, described the abuses in notes after meeting with the men last month.

The notes -- declassified by the U.S. government -- detailed conversations with six of the men, and said on Monday the other five recounted similar treatment.

Major Michael Shavers, a Pentagon spokesman, would not offer a point-by-point rebuttal of the allegations. But he said, "It is important to note that al Qaeda training manuals emphasise the tactic of making false abuse allegations."

The worst of the abuse, which Wilner labelled torture, took place at the hands of U.S. forces at detention facilities in Afghanistan and Pakistan before the men were taken to Guantanamo, first used to detain terrorism suspects in January 2002, he said.

"All of them were hung from their wrists and beaten, sometimes beaten with chains. At least one was hung upside down from his ankles and beaten. They were all beaten, they said, until they would pass out," Wilner said.

"They were stripped naked and kept naked for extended periods of time. They were taunted while naked by female guards. At least one of them was sodomized. At least two of them were subjected to electric shocks while hanging from their wrists," Wilner added, with the shocks applied using metal paddles placed under the men's arms.

Wilner said the Kuwaitis were chained in painful positions for such long periods of time that they would urinate and defecate on themselves.

'MOCKED FOR BEING MUSLIMS'

"In the original prisons in Pakistan and Afghanistan and at Guantanamo, the most disturbing thing to most of them was religious humiliation. They were mocked for being Muslims," Wilner said.

"Both there and at Guantanamo, their Korans were taken, thrown on the floor, stepped on, thrown in the toilets. Their body hair and head hair would be shaved, and crosses would be shaved into it," Wilner added.

The men said they made "false confessions" to being part of the Taliban or al Qaeda to stop the torture, according to Wilner. He said one prisoner "specifically said to me, 'Look, when this is happening, you tell them what they want to hear to make them stop.'"

The abuse was milder at Guantanamo, although several were "very badly beaten up" there and placed in painful stress positions, and at least one was bent over a table and threatened with sodomy, Wilner said.

Shavers said U.S. policy "condemns and prohibits torture" and that "credible allegations" of illegal conduct by U.S. personnel are taken seriously and investigated.

The United States currently holds about 545 foreign citizens at Guantanamo. Nearly all are being held without charges and some have been imprisoned there for more than three years. The United States has designated them "enemy combatants" and denied them prisoner of war status, which brings certain rights under international law.

The United States has faced international criticism for its treatment of the Guantanamo prisoners. Even FBI memos made public recently accused Pentagon interrogators of using "torture techniques."

"I think that Guantanamo is a stain on the reputation of the United States, a stain on the honour of our nation," Wilner said.