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'Gitmo' Protestors Queried by Treasury

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 7 (UPI) -- A Christian group will not cooperate with a Treasury Department inquiry into its trip to Cuba to protest a controversial U.S. prison, hoping for a court date.

Witness Against Torture made the trip to Cuba last December. The 26 protestors flew into Havana and rented cars, and then walked 107 kilometers over five days to the outer gate of Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, where they held a vigil and protested for four days.

The base is home to a controversial U.S. military jail for prisoners deemed "enemy combatants" and captured during the war on terrorism.

The group is refusing to answer questions posed to it by the Treasury Department, although it is furnishing a complete list of names and addresses of those who went. Just seven of the 26 have received notices from Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control.

Because of an economic embargo, U.S. law prohibits Americans from visiting Cuba without a special permit. Witness Against Torture members who participated risk a maximum of 10 years in prison or a \$250,00 fine for the Cuban odyssey.

"Eventually, what we hope (to do) by not furnishing the information is have a day in court, and be able to explain why we went, why we didn't feel we needed a license" said Frida Berrigan, a spokeswoman for the group.

"We weren't going to Cuba, we were going to Gitmo," she said. "We feel the administration has very cynically and insidiously hidden (the jail) there and put it out of reach of American citizens.

"We knew we wouldn't be given a license to do what we wanted to do (at) what the United States treats as U.S. territory," Berrigan said.

Witness Against Torture says it was practicing "the Christian act of prisoner visitation."

"I find it extremely hypocritical that Washington is investigating this group for the 'crime' of traveling to Cuba. The U.S. government is flagrantly violating even the most basic norms of human rights -- such as indefinite detention without charges, denial of fair trials and, most importantly, torture," stated Michael Ratner, the President of the Center for Constitutional Rights, in a press release issued by Witness Against Torture.