

U.S. Holds Terror Suspects at Secret Locations, Red Cross Says

July 13 (Bloomberg) -- U.S. officials are detaining terror suspect at undisclosed locations around the world, avoiding access to the International Committee of the Red Cross, a spokeswoman for the Geneva-based aid organization said.

The Red Cross hasn't had access to a "certain number" of detainees identified as arrested on the Web site of the Federal Bureau of Investigation or in media reports, said Antonella Notari, a Red Cross spokeswoman, declining to provide an estimate.

"We can't say if these undisclosed detentions constitute a breach of the Geneva Convention, since we don't know if they were arrested as part of an international armed conflict," Notari said. "Some may, some may not." The Geneva Convention only provides the Red Cross with automatic access to prisoners of wars.

U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld last month said he agreed to a CIA request to take control of a suspected Iraqi terrorist and not list him as a prisoner. The prisoner had been held since October without being given an identification number and without notification to the Red Cross, which violated the Geneva Accords on treatment of prisoners of war.

"The U.S. has apologized in this case, and the detainee is now registered with us," Notari said.

Top-ranking al-Qaeda strategist Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who was arrested in the Pakistani capital Islamabad in March 2003, is among the terror suspects that the Red Cross has not been able to visit, Notari said.

The aid organization has access to the U.S. prisons in Cuba's Guantanamo Bay, Afghanistan's Bagram air base and the city of Kandahar, as well as to a "large number" of U.S.-controlled prisons in Iraq, Notari said.

The U.S. government hasn't officially responded to the Red Cross demand to be notified about all detainees, including those at undisclosed locations.

"We're still waiting for a U.S. reply," Notari said. That request was made Red Cross President Jakob Kellenberger in January.

The U.S. army, which holds "thousands" of prisoners at detention centers in Iraq, has started to transfer control over some of them to the interim Iraqi government, including Iraq's deposed President Saddam Hussein. The Red Cross is now negotiating visits with the interim government but hasn't had access to them yet, Notari said.

Last year the ICRC visited 460,000 detainees in 80 countries to help those whose rights may have been violated.