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From: Brancato, Gilda M
Sent: Wednesday, October 15, 2003 11:17 AM
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Subject: FW: French Guantanamo lawyers in U.N. torture appeal

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From: Greaney, Brian E
Sent: Wednesday, October 15, 2003 10:57 AM
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Subject: French Guantanamo lawyers in U.N. torture appeal

BC-FRANCE-GUANTANAMO

French Guantanamo lawyers in U.N. torture appeal

By Mark John

PARIS, Oct 15 (Reuters) - Lawyers for four French nationals held in the Guantanamo Bay U.S. military base said on Wednesday they had asked the United Nations to investigate evidence that they were being subjected to psychological torture.

Citing accounts that prisoners at the camp suffer periods of solitary confinement, lack of exercise and other privations, the lawyers said they would also urge France to launch an appeal to the International Court of Justice.

"We have asked the U.N. special rapporteur to launch an inquiry. We would like him to go there and produce a report on his findings," lawyer Paul-Albert Iweins told reporters.

"There is no reliable account of direct physical torture," Iweins said. But he stressed the 1984 U.N. Convention on Torture covers acts that inflict both physical and mental suffering.

About 660 suspected Taliban and al Qaeda members are being held at the Guantanamo Bay camp after they were captured during the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan, which began after the September 11, 2001 hijacked plane attacks on U.S. landmarks.

Iweins and colleagues represent Mourad Benchellali, Khaled Ben Mustafa, Nizar Sassi and Ridouane Khalid, four out of a total of six French nationals held at the camp.

In a separate opinion issued in May, a U.N. human rights body found the detention of the first three and Spaniard Hamed Abderrahaman Ahmed illegal under international codes on human rights.

"French authorities have told us they (the four French nationals) are small fry," said lawyer William Bourdon, adding there was no evidence of them being involved in terrorism.

No charges have been brought against any of the Guantanamo detainees, but the United States has identified a handful it considers eligible for military tribunals.

Washington says the prisoners are "enemy combatants" and not prisoners of war who are granted a wide range of protections under international law.

Britain, Washington's closest ally over the Iraq war, has won concessions on the treatment of some of its nationals being held in Guantanamo, including the possibility of any future trial taking place in Britain.

France, whose staunch opposition to the war triggered a diplomatic row with the United States, has in public merely raised its concerns over camp conditions.

Justice Minister Dominique Perben raised the issue with U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft in May and the two men will discuss the treatment of Guantanamo prisoners in fresh talks in coming weeks, a spokesman for Perben said.

would be raised in fresh talks between Perben and Ashcroft scheduled for the coming weeks.

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