

ICRC VISITS GITMO EARLY IN MIDST OF HUNGER STRIKE, NEW CONTROVERSY OVER DRINKING WATER

On Tuesday, Carol Rosenberg reported that the hunger strike at Guantanamo prison camp has become serious enough that the International Committee of the Red Cross has arrived at Guantanamo a week earlier than had previously been planned:

Two delegates from the International Committee of the Red Cross, one of them a physician, are at Guantánamo this week in an accelerated trip moved up from next month to check out the ongoing hunger strike at the war on terror prison.

Red Cross spokesman Simon Schorno said Tuesday morning that the regularly schedule two-week mission was meant to start April 1.

"However, in an effort to better understand current tensions and the ongoing hunger strike, we have decided to start this visit one week earlier," said Schorno.

Yesterday, the controversy at the prison expanded. Jason Leopold broke the news via Twitter that attorneys for some of the prisoners have filed an emergency court petition in response to claims that guards at the prison have cut off bottled drinking water and that the tap water prisoners have been told to drink

is not potable. Leopold provided links to both the court petition and a declaration from a doctor for one of the prisoners. From the filing requesting an emergency motion:

- a. Musa'ab has been on a hunger strike for an extended period, to protest the disrespect shown to the Qur'an by Guantánamo guards and the return of the harsh conditions that existed in 2002 and 2003. Musa'ab is consuming only water, and no food.
- b. The degraded conditions at the prison have become so extreme that virtually all of the detainees are participating in the hunger strike as a protest to the treatment being inflicted upon them.
- c. For the past 3 days, prison authorities have denied Musa'ab – and others within his and one other cell block – access to potable water. When Musa'ab and his fellow prisoners requested drinking water, the guards told them to drink from the faucets. The tap water at Guantánamo Bay Naval Station is not potable, and residents of the Naval Station drink only bottled water.
- d. The lack of potable water has already caused some prisoners kidney, urinary, and stomach problems.

As if that is not punishment enough, the document continues on the next page (apologies, the form of the document I can access doesn't allow lifting text, so I have to use images):

- e. For the past 10 days, prison authorities have maintained the air conditioning at extremely frigid temperatures, much colder than ever before. The cotton clothing provided to Musa'ab is insufficient to keep him warm under these super-cooled conditions.

Later in the day yesterday, Rosenberg reported that the White House now claims to be monitoring the strike situation:

The White House said Wednesday it was keeping an eye on the hunger strike at the Pentagon's war on terror prison at

Guantánamo and once again blamed Congress for its inability to close the detention center containing 166 captives.

“The White House and the president’s team is closely monitoring the hunger strikers at Guantánamo Bay,” Joshua Earnest, principal deputy press secretary, told reporters in response to a question.

Rosenberg went on to provide denials from a Guantanamo spokesman about the allegations in the court filing:

Separately, attorneys for a Yemeni captive made an emergency court filing on Tuesday night in Washington, D.C., alleging that guards at Guantánamo’s communal camp had denied two cellblocks bottled water since Sunday. The motion also claimed that the temperature in the prison were lowered to “extremely frigid” levels – claims the prison camps spokesman, Durand, denied.

Bottled water continues to be provided, Durand said, adding that tap water is potable at the prison called Camp 6 built of cement blocks at a site that once housed tent cities for Haitian and Cuba migrants. He added that, if Camp 6 captives feel cold, they can walk into the open-air recreation yards, where the temperatures this time of year reaches the high 80s.

“We are assisting the Department of Defense in preparing a response to these allegations via the Department of Justice,” Durand said, “but they are absolutely false.”

AP’s reporting on the situation carries a more extensive denial from Durand:

The U.S. government has not filed a response to the motion. Navy Capt. Robert Durand, a spokesman for the prison, said prisoners are provided with bottled water and that the tap water is safe to drink.

"It's potable water. It's the same water I make my coffee with and that they make lunch with," Durand said. He also denied that there had been any change to the air conditioning settings inside the prison camps.

Complaints about water quality and access to bottled water during hunger strikes are not new at Guantanamo, as similar claims from prisoners surfaced in 2005. Durand had better hope that he is correct in his claims regarding water quality and water sources, since the ICRC has the expertise to test water quality and has a history of doing so at prisons, so there is an independent entity onsite now that can directly assess the accuracy of his claims. Will ICRC be given access to water samples?