

Exhibit E



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Joint Task Force Respects Detainees' Religious Practices

By Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, June 29, 2005 – Members of Joint Task Force Guantanamo, Cuba, go to great lengths to respect the religious practices and beliefs of an estimated 520 enemy combatants being detained there, senior task force leaders told Congress today.

Officials described a sweeping program that ranges from educating servicemembers about Muslim beliefs and sensitivities to incorporating those religious practices into nearly every aspect of camp life.

The procedures are so strict, one member of the House Armed Services Committee quipped during today's hearing that "Guantanamo may be the only place in Cuba where religious freedom is allowed."

Army Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony Mendez from the task force's Joint Detention Group explained to committee members the procedures in place to respect Islam practices.

A loudspeaker at the camp signals the Muslim "call to prayer" five times a day - generally at 5:30 in the morning, 1 and 2:30 in the afternoon, and 7:30 and 9:30 at night, Mendez said.

Once the prayer call sounds, detainees get 20 minutes of uninterrupted time to practice their faith, he said. Those who choose to can take advantage of the prayer caps, beads and oil given to them as part of their basic-issue items and pray toward the Muslim holy city of Mecca, in the direction designated by arrows painted in each detainee cell and all common areas. Detainees who display good behavior and abide by camp rules receive traditional Islam prayer rugs as well, Mendez said.

The Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay staff strives to ensure detainees aren't interrupted during the 20 minutes following the prayer call, even if they're not involved in religious activity, Mendez said.

Staff members schedule detainee medical appointments, interrogations and other activities in accordance with the prayer call schedule. They also post traffic triangles throughout Camp Delta to remind task force members not to disrupt the 20-minute observation period, Mendez explained.

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Strict measures in place throughout the facility ensure appropriate treatment of the Koran, the Muslim holy book.

Every detainee at the facility is issued a personal copy of the Koran, and it is displayed in detainee cells "in plain view and above eye level," Mendez said. This serves two purposes, he said, discouraging detainees from hiding contraband inside its pages and reducing the likelihood of a guard accidentally bumping it or touching it during a cell search.

"The rule of thumb for the guards is that you will not touch the Koran," Mendez said. "That's the bottom line."

In the rare event that guards must touch or move a Koran, they follow strict procedures, all carried out wearing cream-colored latex gloves, Mendez explained. In moving a Koran, they use two hands, place it on a white towel and wrap the towel to cover it, then carry it above waist level. Whenever possible, they do this movement with the assistance of a linguist or translator.

Army Brig. Gen. Jay Hood, commander of Joint Task Force Guantanamo, said the task force respects Muslim dietary practices, flying in food that meets strict Islamic certification requirements and serving only menu items permitted under Muslim law.

The task force also pays tribute to Islamic holy periods, like Ramadan, modifying meal schedules to meet the strict fasting requirements and even offering detainees figs and honey at appropriate times, he said.

To ensure members of Joint Task Force Guantanamo understand Islamic practices, all undergo a program of sensitivity training before their assignments, Hood said. They learn about cultural differences and how to observe them on the job, from how to use their hands to what to do with their feet to whether it's appropriate for a detainee to be required to look into the eyes of a woman guard when she's talking to him, he said.

Once they report to Guantanamo Bay for duty, new task force members get "walked through" these practices and procedures to ensure they understand them, he said.

Hood told the congressional panel he's convinced that Joint Task Force Guantanamo is doing everything possible to ensure religious freedom for detainees.

"I don't see how anybody can look to the efforts we have put into (ensuring detainees' freedom to practice their religion)" and believe otherwise, he said.

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