

## Hicks in 'nightmarish' isolation

January 27, 2007 - 4:20PM

David Hicks is spending 22 hours a day in "nightmarish" isolation in conditions described by Guantanamo Bay inmates as "a dungeon above the ground", court documents suggest.

Fresh evidence about the treatment of prisoners in the US military base has been revealed amid deepening concerns about the Australian terrorist suspect's mental state, and just days before Hicks receives a visit from his Australian lawyer.

Conditions inside Hicks' cell block at the naval base in Cuba are so bad that detainees are suffering mental health problems ranging from "crushing loneliness" to hearing "voices", the documents say.

Life inside Guantanamo Bay's Camp 6, where Hicks was transferred in early December from another section of the prison, has been detailed in declarations filed in a case in the US District Court.

Lawyers are trying to expedite hearings for five terrorist suspects who are Uighur Muslims from the Xinjiang region of northern China that borders Central Asia.

The documents say the impact of Camp 6 conditions on the inmates has been "profound", and all five Uighurs are struggling to pass the days of "infinite tedium and loneliness".

"All describe a feeling of despair, crushing loneliness and abandonment by the world," a statutory declaration by the men's lawyer, Sabin Willett, said.

"One felt he was in the 'dungeon above the ground'; another said 'it feels like we are in tunnels'.

"All expressed a desperate desire for sunlight, fresh air and someone to speak to."

The tiny cells in camp 6 are constructed of solid metal and receive no natural air or sunlight.

There are no windows except for small glass strips which provide a view of the corridor, a clock and the military police guarding them.

They eat and pray alone and have no reading material other than the Koran.

Each inmate is allowed two hours "rec time" every 24 hours, but this is frequently only called late at night or in the early hours of the morning.

Recreation time is spent in a confined area measuring three metres by four metres and surrounded by concrete walls two storeys high, giving prisoners little chance of seeing the sun.

The US military had imposed on the men "a regimen of isolation and cruelty unheard of in penal or military law and unknown to civilised people", said Willett, who visited Guantanamo Bay on January 15 to 18.

Hicks', who is waiting for fresh charges to be laid against him, has been held at Guantanamo Bay without trial for five years and has been in continuous isolation since March last year.

His American military lawyer, Marine Corps Major Michael Mori, said he was disturbed by the reported conditions inside Camp 6.

"It's worse than even our supermax prisons in the United States," he told AAP.

"They've got TV, they've got books. These people don't have anything."

Hicks' Australian lawyer David McLeod left for Cuba yesterday and is due to visit Guantanamo on Monday, but has said there is no guarantee his Adelaide-born client will agree to see him.

The 31-year-old, who was captured among Taliban forces in Afghanistan in December 2001, refused to take a phone call from his family just before Christmas, raising fresh concerns about his emotional state.

Charges of conspiracy, aiding the enemy and attempted murder were dropped after the US Supreme Court ruled last June that the military commissions to try Guantanamo Bay detainees were unlawful.

The Pentagon announced a new system of military commissions earlier this month and Hicks is expected to face fresh charges within weeks.

**AAP**

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