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BRATISLAVA, Jul 2, 2010 (IPS) - A former Guantanamo Bay prisoner at a refugee detention centre in Slovakia has said he is prepared to die in hunger strike after living five months in conditions he says are worse than in the infamous U.S. prison.

Adil Al-Gazzar, one of three former Guantanamo Bay prisoners on hunger strike at a detention facility in Medvedov, western Slovakia, told IPS: "I am feeling weak and sick and getting worse. But I am not going to stop until I get a resolution to my problems, and I will go on with my hunger strike until I die if I must." The strike entered its tenth day Friday.

Egyptian Al-Gazzar, Azerbaijani Poolad Tsiradz and Tunisian Rafik Al-Hami arrived in Slovakia in January after Slovak authorities agreed to take the detainees under an EU-U.S. agreement as U.S. President Barack Obama tried to close down the controversial jail in Cuba.

All three were held for years at the prison. They claim they had been wrongly interned, and deny being terrorists.

But Al-Gazzar, a former Egyptian soldier who lost a leg after an attack by U.S. forces in Afghanistan in November 2001 when he was a volunteer for the Red Crescent in the country, said that since arriving all three have been denied basic freedoms on a scale worse than anything they experienced at Guantanamo.

He told IPS: "Conditions here are worse than in Guantanamo, I can say that with no hesitation. In Guantanamo I was allowed to be outside for 20 hours a day. Here I am allowed to go out only for one hour. I have no idea why. In Guantanamo I was allowed to pray with other Muslims in a mosque but here that is not allowed either. They say it would be a security risk. Why? I do not understand.

"No one from the Slovak authorities has spoken to us. When I ask about all these things they keep saying the same thing - that they do not have time to talk to us."

Other refugees at the holding facility have been ordered not to speak to the three men, and local media have reported that when they are allowed out for their one hour, they are followed by armed guards. The three men also complain they are kept in isolation and only allowed visits from their lawyers.

There have also been claims that the trio were misled by Slovak authorities about how long they would have to stay at a holding facility when they arrived in Slovakia. Al-Gazzar told a local journalist that the men were not told they would be held in detention but that they would be free with some restrictions. When they came to Slovakia, he said, they were told they had to stay six months in an asylum facility. Now they have been told they face another half a year in a different facility.

In cases where Guantanamo Bay prisoners have been relocated to other countries in Europe they have, according to activists following the former prisoners' fates, been provided with housing within weeks, and able to live freely and receive help with integration into society.

Al-Gazzar told IPS: "In other countries people like us get spending money, housing and Internet connections. We are not allowed the Internet. Why not? They will not tell us."

Rights organisations have condemned the authorities' failure to grant them any legal status even though they have been in the country five months now.

They also question why the men are being held at a detention facility even though when they arrived in Slovakia the Foreign Ministry publicly stated they were not criminals.

Branislav Tichy, head of Amnesty International in Slovakia, told IPS: "The prisoners have said that the conditions they face here in Slovakia are worse than those in Guantanamo. Their

largest concern, though, is with their very unclear status and this is why they are hunger strike. We have spoken to the authorities and they have told us that their 'status is being decided at the moment' - five months after they arrived.

"They say that they have not had this kind of situation before and so there is nothing that they can compare it with. The normal processing time for asylum applicants is three months, but the authorities say that they are not in any asylum procedures, so their status is unclear. This is what we, and the three men, want resolved. Amnesty has been calling on the authorities to resolve this from the day they arrived here."

Some observers say that their treatment raises questions over whether the Slovak authorities are looking after them as they should.

The Slovak Interior Ministry's Migration Office which is dealing with the men's cases has denied the trio's claims, and said they are suffering from post- traumatic stress.

Bernard Priecel, head of the Migration Office, told local media the men "enjoy high standards in terms of both security and the re-integration process itself and are receiving personal treatment eight hours a day, including psychological care and lessons in the Slovak language."

Following the hunger strike the Interior Ministry has suggested the men may now be moved to a boarding house.

Al-Gazzar remains defiant and says that until someone from the Slovak authorities speaks to him and resolves his lack of freedom and status in Slovakia, he will continue to refuse food.

"All I want is my freedom and for my status to be resolved," he told IPS.