

Guantanamo trial access 'denied'

Three human rights groups say the Pentagon has turned down their request to observe the military tribunal trials of detainees at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Human Rights First were told there was not enough courtroom space.

A Pentagon official said some reporters and the Red Cross would get seats, but their request would be kept "in mind".

The groups accuse the US of trying to control coverage of the controversial trials of some 650 terror suspects.

The three rights groups strive to monitor sensitive trials around the world, including trials for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

They said they wanted to attend the US military tribunals to provide the world with "independent and informed analysis of the trials".

Criticism

Amnesty International spokesman Alistair Hodgett said the US State Department annually criticises other countries for closing trials to international monitors.

"It seems like that medicine can't be taken at home despite us prescribing it abroad," he said.

He said that his organisation had been able to observe trials in countries such as Libya and Egypt.

Countries that have refused include North Korea, China, Cuba and Myanmar, he said.

"There's a contrast here that ought to startle people who care about open-trial processes," Mr Hodgett added.

The groups say the Pentagon told them it planned to provide courtroom space only for certain journalists and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In a letter to Human Rights Watch, Air Force Brigadier General Thomas Hemingway said no charges had yet been approved and no location yet designated for the trials.

But he admitted seating would be limited if the tribunals are held at the US naval station on Guantanamo Bay.

"We will keep your request in mind should the Department of Defense be able to accommodate Human Rights Watch at military commission proceedings in the future," he added.

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