

# Activists march toward base

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**GUANTANAMO, Cuba** - International peace activists marched to the Cuban military zone wrapping around the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay today to demand closure of the U.S. military prison for terror suspects five years after the first detainees arrived.

The dozen protesters, including relatives of one detainee and American "peace mom" Cindy Sheehan, walked along a lonesome asphalt highway connecting the Cuban city of Guantánamo to the military zone. Sheehan wore a peace sign medallion around her neck.

They chanted, "Gitmo prison is a source of shame, no more torture in our name," and held signs saying, "Due process is overdue" and "There are no justice-free zones." The brother of British citizen Omar Dehayes carried a large color photograph of the detainee that said, "Justice for my brother."

It was not immediately clear how close the group would get to the actual base, where the U.S. military is holding about 395 men on suspicion of links to al Qaeda or the Taliban, including about 85 who have been cleared to be released or transferred to other countries. The military says it wants to charge 60 to 80 detainees and bring them to trial.

U.S. Army Col. Lora Tucker, a spokeswoman for the detention center, said the military had no plans to acknowledge the protest or increase security at the gate, which is located at a distance from the prison camp on the other side of a hill.

"Nothing changes for us based on a demonstration being held somewhere in Cuba," she said, adding that today was "a normal work day" at the Navy base.

The U.S. military planned no special events to mark the date.

The group in Cuba planned to read the names of all the men still held at the prison.

A day earlier, the activists screened a film for Guantánamo city residents about former prisoners at the U.S. military base, including Asif Iqbal, a British Muslim

detainee released two years ago who returned to Guantánamo to join the protest.

"We should be able to shut down the U.S. prison," Medea Benjamin, who organized the protest through the California groups Global Exchange and Codepink, said before the screening of the movie *The Road to Guantánamo*, prompting a standing ovation by several hundred Cubans at the event. "Let's dream about closing down the base completely."

Residents of Guantánamo largely resent the presence of the U.S. base, which their government considers a violation of the communist-run nation's sovereignty.

Zohra Zewawi, the mother of detainee British citizen Dehayes, traveled from the United Arab Emirates with another son, Taher Deghayes, to join the protest. She says her son has been tortured and blinded in one eye since he was imprisoned in September 2002 and still has not been charged or tried.

Sheehan, of Vacaville, Calif., became an anti-war activist after her 24-year-old son Casey was killed in Iraq. She drew international attention and was dubbed the "peace mom" after she camped outside President Bush's Texas ranch.

The protesters arrived in Guantánamo from Havana on Tuesday night and on Wednesday held a daylong international conference that featured members of their group and Cubans from Guantánamo, many of them high school and university teachers.

"They feel a lot of pain because their city is known for the prison," Benjamin said of the Cuban teachers.