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## US seeks delay in Guantanamo detainees habeas appeal

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WASHINGTON (AFP) — The US government is seeking a new one-month delay in hearings on 250 Guantanamo detainees challenging the legality of their detention, saying it needs more time to review and declassify key documents.

Gregory Katsas, a US Department of Justice assistant attorney general, said in a brief obtained by AFP Tuesday that the sensitive nature of documents in the case requires security clearances for the roughly 50 attorneys assigned to it.

"It may take several weeks for them to obtain the necessary security clearance," he wrote in his request seeking a delay through the end of September.

More than 250 detainees, some of whom have spent several years at the US Navy-run prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, have submitted habeas corpus petitions to the court, arguing that they are being held illegally without charge or trial.

Katsas added that cooperation among various law enforcement and intelligence operations working on the trial also is "a complex and time-consuming process that requires coordination."

"We needed to secure computers, copiers, and other infrastructure to ensure the lawful and secure handling of classified information," Katsas said in his filing to the court, which had sought the documents by August 31.

But critics of the process accused the administration of President George W. Bush of trying to delay the whole process, which weighs one of the most fundamental US constitutional rights -- protection against illegal detention -- until he leaves office in January.

"The administration made this a mess by seeking to avoid judicial review at all costs, causing years of delay and profound uncertainty," said Senator Patrick Leahy, who leads the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The Center for Constitutional Rights, a law group that has challenged the Guantanamo detentions in court, said the government was making "a shocking attempt to drag us into years of further legal challenges and delays."

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