

GUANTANAMO BAY PRISON CAMPS

Swiss to take in 2 Uighur detainees

■ In a rebuke to China, Switzerland said it will take two Muslim Uighurs soon to be released from Guantánamo.

BY CAROL ROSENBERG

crosenberg@MiamiHerald.com

The Swiss government rebuffed Chinese protests Wednesday and agreed to give sanctuary to two brothers of the Muslim Uighur minority who had been cleared for release from Guantánamo, but feared persecution if they went home.

The announcement represented a breakthrough for Arkin Mahnut, 45, and his brother Bahtiar, 32, currently held in a chain-link-fence enclosed compound, Camp Iguana.

One of the brothers had been offered sanctuary elsewhere but refused to leave without the other, who has reportedly developed a mental illness during his eight years in U.S. detention.

The Swiss had earlier taken in an Uzbek man from Guantánamo, and said in a statement it was doing its part to “contribute to the closing of the U.S. Guantánamo Bay detention center, which it had criticized as being contrary to international laws.”

“There is no evidence that the three might have had or have any contact with terrorist groups,” it added. “The USA neither charged them with any crime nor sentenced

them and in 2005 declared they could be accepted by other countries.”

Switzerland agreed to take the two men after Connecticut attorney Elizabeth Gilson spent a week conducting media tours there, according to the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York.

Gilson and other lawyers sued on their behalf in civilian courts — until the Bush administration declared in October 2008 that it could no longer defend the continued detention of 17 Uighurs at Guantánamo.

The men were captured in Afghanistan in 2001. They said they fled their communist nation for religious freedom. “They were brought there after Pakistani villagers kidnapped and sold them for substantial bounty payments offered by the U.S.,” Gilson said. “All they want now, after all these years, is to live peacefully in a democratic country where they will be safe.”

Swiss Minister of Justice Evelyn Widmer-Schlumpf said the decision “was guided by humanitarian principles and should not be interpreted as giving preference to one country over another.”

Switzerland said it would issue the men migration permits and they had agreed to honor Swiss values, try to earn a living and learn the local language.

