

Suit targets warrantless wiretaps

A group claims the U.S. illegally spied on 16 lawyers for detainees at Guantanamo and seeks records from the NSA.

By HENRY WEINSTEIN
Times Staff Writer

A civil liberties organization on Thursday sued the Justice Department and the National Security Agency in New York federal court, alleging that the government illegally spied on 16 lawyers who have represented detainees at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station in Cuba.

The suit, filed by the Center for Constitutional Rights, demands that the agencies comply with requests filed under the Freedom of Information Act to

turn over all records of the NSA's warrantless wiretapping of the attorneys.

The secret eavesdropping program was launched after the Sept. 11 attacks and came to light in December 2005. In January 2006, the center submitted requests for records pertaining to the surveillance of the lawyers, said Shayana Kadidal, a center attorney.

The NSA and the Department of Justice refused to provide relevant documents within the required time, the plaintiffs' attorneys said.

"I am outraged that the NSA and DOJ have categorically refused to say whether they have eavesdropped — without a warrant — on me or other attorneys simply because we have fought for basic due process for men imprisoned without charge or trial at Guantanamo," said New York lawyer Wells Dixon, one of the

plaintiffs.

The government had no comment on the lawsuit. U.S. officials have acknowledged the existence of the Terrorist Surveillance Program, saying that it targets telephone calls and e-mails "only when one party is outside the U.S. and there is probable cause to believe that at least one party is a member or agent of Al Qaeda or an affiliated terrorist organization." But they have declined to provide details, saying it would harm efforts in the war on terrorism.

"The government believes . . . that pretty much all of our post-9/11 clients" have links to terrorism, Kadidal said. "So we think our calls to them fit the narrow category of calls," Kadidal said, "that Atty. Gen. Alberto Gonzales" told Congress the NSA was targeting.

henry.weinstein@latimes.com

