

Saudi Arabia to free Guantanamo returnees during Ramadan

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Saudi Arabia is temporarily releasing all Guantanamo Bay returnees held in Saudi jails to spend the Muslim holy month of Ramadan with their families, an official said on Friday.

The United States this year sent 29 Saudis home after negotiating a framework agreement with Saudi Arabia for the return of its citizens from the controversial prison.

"All those detainees who came back from Guantanamo are being released for the whole month of Ramadan, to fast Ramadan with their families and celebrate Eid with their families," Interior Minister spokesman Mansour al-Turki said.

"They will be back after Eid to complete the related procedures," he said, adding they were serving various sentences. The Muslim fasting month of Ramadan begins this weekend and is followed by the Eid Al Fitr holiday.

Turki said the authorities had already released some over the past month to spend several days with their families in a programme he described as a success.

In August, Saudi authorities said 9 returnees had been freed for lack of evidence against them.

Public anger over the treatment of the Saudi detainees in Guantanamo has been high in the kingdom. Two Saudis were among the three prisoners who hanged themselves in June at Guantanamo. Many Saudis suspect they died from maltreatment.

The authorities have organised a wedding for one of the returnees and have supported the education of their children.

About 95 of the 450 men still held at Guantanamo are Saudi citizens and the government has said it hopes to bring all of them back within a year.

Many held at the prison in Cuba were captured in Afghanistan in the US-led war to oust the Taleban after al Qaeda carried out the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks against US cities.