

Somali ex-colonel living in Columbus ordered torture, lawsuit says

Defendant helped run dictator's security force, complaint alleges

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COLUMBUS -- A former Somali military colonel now living in Ohio ordered the detention and torture of a lawyer and human rights advocate in Somalia in 1988, an ordeal that permanently crippled the victim, according to a federal lawsuit filed today.

The lawsuit claims Abdi Aden Magan of Columbus authorized the torture of Abukar Hassan Ahmed when Magan served as investigations chief of the National Security Service of Somalia, a force dubbed the "Gestapo of Somalia."

Ahmed, now retired in London, says the three months of torture he endured make it painful for him to sit and injured his bladder so much that he is incontinent.

Ahmed suffered from "threatened infliction of severe physical pain or suffering, the threat of imminent death, and the resulting psychological damage that persists to this day," the lawsuit said.

The suit in U.S. District Court seeks unspecified damages from Magan, who served under Somali dictator Mohamed Siad Barre, according to the filing.

The allegations are a chance for Ahmed to tell the world what happened to him, said Andrea Evans, legal director of the [Center for Justice & Accountability](#), a San Francisco-based center that has brought a number of similar lawsuits.

"We see it as a much broader call for justice than just financial gain," Evans said. "It really is kind of telling history accurately."

Ahmed fled Somalia in 1989 just ahead of being arrested again, living later in Italy and then

To learn more

- [Read a copy of today's lawsuit \(PDF\)](#).

London, where he received political asylum and became a citizen, according to the lawsuit.

For his part, Magan left Somalia after the government collapsed in 1991 and eventually came to the United States and then Columbus where he joined his wife, Evans said.

Magan could not be immediately reached, and court records did not list an attorney.

Columbus has the country's second-largest population of Somalis after the Minneapolis area. Many emigrated from refugee camps in Kenya, attracted by Ohio's low cost of living and, at least in the 1990s, plentiful jobs.

The lawsuit was filed under the Alien Tort Statute, an 18th-century law that can allow damages for violations of international law, and the Torture Victims Protection Act, which permits noncitizens to seek damages for torture and illegal killings abroad if the alleged perpetrators live in or have assets in the U.S.

The complaint alleges that under Magan, the security forces "systematically targeted ordinary citizens perceived as opponents of the Barre regime and subjected them to prolonged arbitrary detention, brutal interrogation, and torture."

The suit said Ahmed was arrested on Nov. 20, 1988, detained and accused of being a contributing writer to Amnesty International, a human rights group that had advocated on behalf of Ahmed years earlier when he was in prison.

Ahmed was also accused of being a member of a rebel group protesting the Barre regime. Authorities held Ahmed in a windowless cell on a starvation diet with no toilet and interrogated him day and night, according to the lawsuit.

On Feb. 8, 1988, two military officers who said they were acting on Magan's authority tortured Ahmed by beating and choking him and crushing his genitals with iron instruments, the lawsuit said.

Ahmed was released in March 1989, then harassed by security officers for four months before fleeing the country, according to the complaint.

Similar lawsuits have been brought in recent years against ex-military officials living in the U.S. and accused of torture in Bosnia, El Salvador, Haiti, Liberia and Peru.

The U.S. Supreme Court is debating the merits of a lawsuit involving alleged wrongdoing by another Somali government official from the same era. That case has broad implications for the future of such lawsuits.

At issue is whether foreign officials, not just countries and their agencies, receive immunity in federal court from being sued for their actions while in power.

Mohamed Ali Samantar was defense minister and prime minister of Somalia in the 1980s and early 1990s under Barre. He now lives in Virginia and is being sued by victims who say he was responsible for killings, rapes and torture, including waterboarding.

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