



Ex-Somali PM Samantar ordered to pay torture damages

A US court has ordered former Somali Prime Minister Mohamed Ali Samantar to pay \$21m (£13m) to seven Somalis who accused him of torture and killings.

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The US-based Somalis filed the case eight years ago, furious that Mr Samantar was living in the country.

They alleged that he was responsible for atrocities during the brutal reign of ex-President Siad Barre in the 1980s.

Mr Samantar, 76, has declared himself bankrupt.



Aziz Deria is one of seven Somalis who filed the lawsuit in 2004

Rights activists said the ruling showed that foreign officials could be held accountable in the US.

"What this case says is people who were tortured by foreign officials around the world can go to court, can sue them, can hold them civilly liable for their illegal conduct," Andrea Prasow, a lawyer for the US-based group Human Rights Watch, told the BBC.

The Center for Victims of Torture estimates that up to 500,000 people living in the US were tortured abroad, often by their own governments.

'Rape of relatives'

The lawsuit seeking financial damages was initially dismissed by a US federal judge, but was overturned on appeal.

In 2010, the Supreme Court ruled that Mr Samantar did not have diplomatic immunity and the case went ahead.

The seven Somalis - including businessman Mr Aziz Deria - accused Mr Samantar of controlling military and intelligence agencies that were involved in the killing, rape and torture of their relatives.

Mr Samantar said the lawsuit was politically motivated and would further divide war-torn Somalia

"I worked for 40 years for my country. I was faithful to my country and abided by the law," he said.

Mr Samantar served as prime minister and defense minister in the Siad Barre regime, which was overthrown in 1991.

It was the last functioning government in Somalia.

The country subsequently descended into clan-based and religious conflict.

Most of southern and central Somalia is now controlled by the militant Islamist group al-Shabab.