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City man liable in torture lawsuit

Ex-Somali army colonel accused of 1988 brutality

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A federal judge has found a former Somali colonel who lives in Columbus liable for torturing a human-rights attorney more than two decades ago before a brutal civil war fractured his country.

It's the first time a judge has held a former member of Somalia's National Security Service accountable for human-rights violations, according to the Center for Justice and Accountability, a San Francisco-based human-rights group.

"It's showing that individuals who commit these types of crimes will be held accountable for what they've done," said Christina Hioureas, a New York lawyer representing the victim.

In his ruling yesterday, U.S. District Judge George C. Smith found that Abdi Aden Magan was liable for the "arbitrary detention, torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment" for overseeing the treatment of Abukar Hassan Ahmed.

Ahmed, who now lives in England, filed a lawsuit against Magan in 2010. In his suit, he said he was arrested in November 1988 and was tortured for three months.

According to yesterday's order, Ahmed said he was restricted to a starvation diet of "rancid" food, confined close to his own urine and excrement, and deprived of sleep.

In a motion, Ahmed said officers accused him of writing for Amnesty International and belonging to opposition groups, and threatened to kill him if he didn't confess.

He said that officers tied his big toes together and then pushed his legs over his head. He also said they beat him with wooden sticks while holding an AK-47 to his head. He said guards forced water, sand and small stones into his mouth.

They were acting under Magan's orders, according to the human-rights group.

“These are the types of tactics they used to suppress political opponents for standing up for international human rights and free speech,” Hioureas said.

A message left at Magan’s Northeast Side home near Agler Road wasn’t returned yesterday.

From 1988 to 1990, Magan was the chief of the National Security Service’s Department of Investigations under dictator Mohamed Siad Barre, who ruled from 1969 until 1991. Magan also was a member of the ruling Darod clan. He left the country in 1991 and came to the United States, eventually settling in Columbus. Ahmed was a member of the rival Hawiye clan and a critic of the government.

“The NSS was widely feared,” said Kathy Roberts, a staff attorney for the Center for Justice and Accountability.

Hioureas said the next step would be for the court to schedule an evidentiary hearing for compensatory and punitive damages to be paid to Ahmed.

Columbus is home to the second-largest Somali community in the United States.

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2012/11/21/city-man-liable-in-torture-lawsuit.html>