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Judgment in Somalia Human Rights Case Deemed 'Historic'

By [Kathy Lynn Gray](#)

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A federal magistrate in Columbus has recommended that a former Somali colonel pay a human-rights activist he tortured in Somalia \$15 million in damages.

Human-rights supporters are hailing the judgment as historic.

“It shows the United States will not be a safe haven for those who commit human-rights abuses,” Christina G. Hioureas, an attorney for Abukar Hassan Ahmed, said today.

“It sends a message that those who commit these abuses will be held accountable.”

U.S. District Judge George C. Smith found last year that Abdi Aden Magan, then a Columbus resident, had severely tortured Ahmed in the late 1980s. Magan was the National Security Service investigations chief under the military dictatorship of Mohamed Siad Barre at the time.

Magistrate Mark R. Abel released his decision on damages today. Hioureas said it was unclear whether Magan would pay the judgment.

In his 2010 civil lawsuit, Ahmed said Magan arrested him in 1988 in Somalia and held him handcuffed in a tiny cell for three months. Ahmed said he slept on the floor, urinated in a milk can and was fed two pieces of bread a day.

Magan threatened to kill him and ordered officers to beat him, contort his body with cords, squeeze his genitals and pour a mixture of water, sand and stones into his mouth, according to testimony during an evidentiary hearing in May.

“Magan said he was above the law, that he was the law,” Nushin Sarkarati, one of Ahmed’s attorneys,

said at the hearing.

She said the Magan case is the first court judgment holding a Somali National Security Service official liable for human-rights violations.

Sarkarati said Ahmed, who now lives in England, was left with permanent physical injuries that made him unable to father children and with mental injuries that interrupt his sleep and generate flashbacks of his torture.

She had asked Abel to order a substantial penalty as punishment and to deter others.

“If you are black, you need justice,” Ahmed told the court during the May hearing. “If you are white, you need justice. If you are yellow, you need justice. So everybody needs justice. It is universal.

“I don’t seek only my justice, but I seek justice for other people also, because I call them the silent victims of torture – in Somalia or in other countries.”

Magan has moved to Kenya and has not participated in the lawsuit for more than a year. He could not be reached for comment. Ahmed is a legal adviser to the president of Somalia.

Sarkarati is an attorney with the Center for Justice and Accountability, a San Francisco-based human-rights organization. The center, as well as Hioureas of Chadbourne & Parke in New York City and Kenneth R. Cookson of Kegler Brown Hill & Ritter in Columbus, represented Ahmed.

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