

# Chicago Tribune

## Ex-Somali PM must pay \$21 million for Alleged torture: U.S. court

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A former Somali prime minister denied diplomatic immunity must pay \$21 million in damages to the victims of his alleged torture and human rights abuse, a U.S. federal court ruled on Tuesday.

Mohamed Ali Samantar, who served as Somalia's defense minister in the 1980s and prime minister from 1987 to 1990, agreed in February to not contest the charges and accept liability for any damages against the seven plaintiffs - four individuals and three estates. The lawsuit, seeking financial damages from Samantar, was filed under the Torture Victim Protection Act in 2004 by a small group of Somalis who said they suffered torture or other abuses in their homeland by soldiers or other government officials under Samantar's general command. Samantar has lived in Virginia since 1997. Some of the plaintiffs are naturalized U.S. citizens.

The case had been followed closely for its foreign policy implications. Granting immunity could allow foreign torturers in the United States to escape responsibility, human rights groups said. The seven plaintiffs do not claim that Samantar personally committed the atrocities or that he was directly involved.

But they said the Somali intelligence agencies and the military police under his command engaged in the killings, rapes and torture of civilians, including the use of electric shocks. A federal judge dismissed the original lawsuit. But a U.S. appeals court reinstated it, ruling the 1976 sovereign immunity law does not apply to individuals. In 2010 the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that Samantar did not have diplomatic protection from lawsuits.

On Tuesday U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Virginia Leonie Brinkema ruled that Samantar owed \$1 million in compensatory damages and \$2 million in punitive damages to each plaintiff. Samantar is going through bankruptcy proceedings and does not have to pay any damages until after those proceedings are resolved.

The case is *Bashe Abdi Yousuf et al. v. Mohamed Ali Samantar*. Case No. 1:04CV1360  
(Reporting by Drew Singer; Editing By Howard Goller and Xavier Briand)

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