

Center for Justice and Accountability

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://cja.org/what-we-do/litigation/ahmed-v-magan/clients/>

Campaign and Advocacy

Abukar Hassan Ahmed is a native of Somalia and currently a naturalized citizen of the United Kingdom. Ahmed was a practicing attorney (a barrister before the Somali courts) as well as a law professor at Somali National University, where he taught courses in constitutional and international law. His curriculum included the protection of human rights contained in the Somali Constitution. Professor Ahmed was outspoken about the Siad Barre military regimes attacks on freedom of expression and widespread abuse of human rights. He felt it was his responsibility as a teacher and as a lawyer to speak candidly to his students about these abuses.

Professor Ahmed was first detained by the National Security Service (NSS) in 1981 and imprisoned without charge until 1986. Professor Ahmed became an Amnesty International (AI) Prisoner of Conscience and AI campaigned for his release. After his release in 1986, Ahmed returned to his law professor position at Somali National University, where he continued to teach his students about human rights protections. He also returned to his law practice to represent clients accused of political offenses before the National Security Court.

On November 20, 1988, NSS officers under Colonel Abdi Aden Magans command arrested Professor Ahmed for carrying a copy of Amnesty Internationals report, Somalia: A Long-Term Human Rights Crisis. Ahmed was taken to the NSS Department of Investigations Prison in the basement of NSS Headquarters in Mogadishu, where he was held in solitary confinement in a small, windowless cell. Except during interrogations, his left wrist was tightly handcuffed to his right leg for twenty-four hours a day. He was placed on a starvation diet of rancid bread, butter and tea once a day and forced to sleep on cold, wet floors. He was interrogated day and night by NSS officers who accused him of writing the Amnesty International report and threatened that, if he did not confess, they would kill him.

On February 7, 1989, Professor Ahmed was taken to Magans office, where the same NSS officers who had interrogated him were also present. Magan accused Professor Ahmed of being a member of the United Somali Congress (USC), a group established in January 1989, while Professor Ahmed was already in NSS detention. Magan told Professor Ahmed that if he did not confess to being a member of the USC, they would get him to confess through torture. After several hours, officers came to Professor Ahmeds cell where they blindfolded and handcuffed him, and brought him to interrogators. Although he was blindfolded, the blindfold was tied loose enough for him to see as the NSS officers brutally tortured him. His hands were tied together with cloths and then handcuffed. His feet were similarly tied together and handcuffed. He was forced to sit down. His legs were pushed back over his head, exposing his genitals. His testicles were squeezed with iron instruments, causing him excruciating pain. A container of water, sand and small stones were forced into his mouth, cutting off his air supply to the point where he fainted. When he regained consciousness, he was beaten. After the torture, he was taken back to his cell.

By the end of February 1989, Professor Ahmed was transferred from the NSS Prison to Central Prison. He was charged with a violation of Article 19 (Law N.54, 1970), Authoring Subversive Material, which carried the death penalty. This was the first time that he learned of any charge against him. One day before his trial, Ahmed received a notice of the trial hearing and learned that the charge against him had been reduced to a violation of Article 18 (Law N.54, 1970), Possession of Subversive Material, which carried a three- to five-year prison year prison sentence or a fine of 15,000 Somali shillings.

On March 8, 1989, Ahmed was taken before the National Security Court (NSC). The trial lasted less than one hour. He was not provided an attorney to represent him. During the trial, Professor Ahmed testified that NSS officers had tortured him and that Magan had ordered his torture. The NSC convicted him and fined him 15,000 Somali shillings. His friend paid the fine on his behalf and he was released.

After his release, Professor Ahmed again returned to his law practice and professor position at Somali National University. NSS officers followed him wherever he went and questioned his students about him. NSS officers under Magans command also repeatedly went to Professor Ahmeds home when he was not there. Each time, his family was told that Magan wanted to see him and questioned his whereabouts.

On July 13, 1989, on the same night that the NSS arrested several other prominent figures and government critics in Mogadishu, Magan and several NSS officers under his command again went to Professor Ahmeds home. Magan and his men waited all night and until noon the next day for Professor Ahmed to return. Professor Ahmed had been away on business and when returned to his home the following evening, his mother told him that Magan and his men had come for him. She urged him to hide. Professor Ahmed immediately went into hiding at a friends home until fleeing Somalia that August.

Professor Ahmed is now legal adviser to the president of Somalia and divides his time between London and Mogadishu. In 2013, he was awarded the [International Bar Association Human Rights Award](#) for his courageous work representing victims of human rights abuses and seeking justice against individuals responsible for human rights abuses in Somalia.



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***"We will never catch all the torturers—but we will always catch some,
and none of them will ever know who is next."***