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## PRESS STATEMENT

## FORMER CHIEF OF "SOMALI GESTAPO" FACES LAWSUIT FOR TORTURE

ACCUSED "SOMALI GESTAPO" CHIEF LIVES IN OHIO

(COLUMBUS, OHIO, April 21, 2010) – Today, the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA) and Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, LLP filed a lawsuit on behalf of constitutional law professor Abukar Hassan Ahmed who was imprisoned and tortured in Somalia during the brutal regime of Siad Barre. The lawsuit was filed against Abdi Aden Magan, a resident of Columbus, Ohio and the former head of the Somali National Security Service (NSS) Department of Investigations during the Barre regime. The NSS, which came to be known as the "Somali Gestapo," engaged in systematic and horrific torture of prisoners. In this complaint, Magan is accused of directly ordering, conspiring with and aiding and abetting subordinates in the torture and other human rights abuses of Mr. Ahmed. Today, more than twenty years after he fled Somalia, Mr. Ahmed still bears the scars -- physical and emotional -- from the torture he suffered.

Mr. Abukar Hassan Ahmed was an esteemed constitutional and international law professor at Somali National University. Despite the fact that critics of the Barre regime were targeted for reprisal, Mr. Ahmed continued to teach his students about the importance of human rights freedoms. He was imprisoned for carrying an Amnesty International report. While in prison, Mr. Ahmed was brutally tortured at Magan's orders.

The United States actively campaigned for Mr. Ahmed's release from prison. Amnesty International also declared him a "Prisoner of Conscience" and advocated for his release. Mr. Ahmed was released in 1989, after spending a combined total of almost six years in prison, much of that in solitary confinement.

No person – in Somalia or elsewhere – has ever been held legally responsible for the abuses committed by the Barre government.

Pamela Merchant, CJA's Executive Director, said, "We are committed to achieving justice for our client who suffered so severely at the hands of the defendant. Human rights violators like the defendant must be held accountable and should not be permitted to live with impunity in the United States."

Tiffany Smith, the filing attorney from Akin Gump, said, "Fortunately there are laws in our country that allow individuals like Mr. Ahmed to pursue legal actions against those responsible for their wrongful imprisonment and torture. We are committed to working with CJA to see this case through to an appropriate resolution."

The lawsuit was filed in Columbus, Ohio in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District Court of Ohio, Eastern Division.

For additional information about the case, please see CJA's website: www.cja.org.

## **About Center for Justice and Accountability**

CJA is a San Francisco-based human rights organization dedicated to deterring torture and other severe human rights abuses around the world and advancing the rights of survivors to seek truth, justice and redress. CJA uses litigation to hold perpetrators individually accountable for human rights abuses, develop human rights law, and advance the rule of law in countries transitioning from periods of abuse.

## **About Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP**

Founded in 1945, **Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP**, a leading international law firm, numbers more than 800 lawyers and advisors in the United States, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Akin Gump is a charter signatory to the Pro Bono Institute's Law Firm Pro Bono Challenge, which asks firms to devote at least 60 pro bono hours per lawyer per year. In 2009, the firm's lawyers devoted more than 55,000 hours to pro bono client matters. This case is part of Akin Gump's Pro Bono Human Rights & Refugee Practice, which now includes three pending ATS lawsuits against human rights abusers from Somalia and Bolivia.

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