

Center for Justice and Accountability

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

<https://cja.org/what-we-do/litigation/yousuf-v-samantar/clients/>

Campaign and Advocacy

Bashe Abdi Yousuf is from Somalia and a naturalized U.S. citizen. In 1979 Bashe started working to improve conditions in schools and hospitals where he lived in Hargeisa. On November 19, 1981, Bashe was arrested by Somali National Security Service (NSS) agents and taken to a government building. On the third night of his detention, government soldiers took him out of his cell and interrogated him about his friends who also worked to support local health care and education.

The next time Bashe was taken out of his cell, he was blindfolded, thrown into a government Land Cruiser, and driven out of the city through a military checkpoint. After arriving in an isolated area, the soldiers removed his handcuffs, tied his hands and feet together, and placed a heavy weight on his back in an excruciating form of torture known as the Mig position. He was also subjected to waterboarding and continuously questioned about anti-government crimes. The torturers threatened to kill Bashe if he did not confess and he feared for his life. When the torture finally ended, he could barely walk. This pattern of torture was repeated multiple times.

After months of horrific abuse, Bashe was convicted in a sham trial of belonging to an anti-government organization. He was transferred to a top-security prison known as Labatan Jirow and confined to a tiny cell for seven years of solitary confinement. Bashe considers those years of isolation to be the worst of all the torture he endured. Bashe was eventually released from prison in 1989 and fled Somalia. He arrived in the United States in 1991.

Aziz Mohamed Deria is from Somalia and a naturalized U.S. citizen. In June 1988, during the Somali Armed Forces attack on Hargeisa, a group of armed and uniformed government soldiers entered the Deria family's home. They abducted Aziz's father, brother, and cousin at gunpoint. Later, when soldiers ordered the Azizs remaining family members from their home to exit the house, they saw Mohammed and Mustafa detained in an open field along with other men from the neighborhood. The Deria family never saw the three men again. Later, the Deria family learned from released detainees that government forces had executed Mohammed.

Buralle Salah Mahamoud is from Somalia and was a goat herder, as his entire family had been for generations. One day late in 1984, Somali government soldiers arrested Buralle and two of his brothers. The brothers were accused of supporting the Somali National Movement (SNM). When they denied having any knowledge of SNM activities, they were forced into a military truck and taken to the military installation in the village of Magaaloyar. There, they were tied in a painful stress position called the Mig position, beaten and kicked. Eventually, the soldiers threw the three brothers into the back of an army truck, while still tied in the Mig position, and transported them to the military base in Burao. They were interrogated and held in unsanitary and cramped conditions with several other men who were also arrested for their Isaaq heritage on suspicion of supporting the SNM.

After four days, Buralle and his brothers were taken to a military court in Burao, where they endured a sham trial along with roughly 80 co-defendants. After four more days in detention, Buralle, his brothers, and estimated 80 other prisoners returned to the court to receive their sentences. Buralle, his brothers, and roughly 40 others were convicted and sentenced to death, with the sentence to be executed immediately.

The prisoners to be executed were directed out of the courthouse and into army trucks waiting outside. As Buralle and his brothers entered the truck, the officer calling their names apparently recognized that the three men were brothers and ordered that Buralle's cuffs be removed. Buralle was directed to stand next to the only two men who had been ordered released. After the truck left with Buralle's brothers, he heard shooting and screaming. The truck returned empty, except for the handcuffs that had held the men condemned to die. Buralle left with the released men, and he fled through the marketplace to the home of a relative. In the market, he met shocked and frightened people who told him about the massacre that had just occurred. His brothers were among the men executed.

Ahmed Jama Gulaid was a non-commissioned Isaaq officer in the Somali National Army assigned to the Hargeisa Department of Public Works. On June 4, 1988, the Somali government disarmed and arrested him and around 60 other soldiers of Isaaq origin at the Somali National Army Second Division Headquarters in Hargeisa. Told they were to be transferred to Mogadishu, the detainees were instead taken to another military base near Malka-dur-duro, an area of dry riverbed that runs through the city. There, the men were told to put their suitcases in one pile, their shoes in another, and they were packed into two small cells to await their execution. One at a time they were removed from the cells, bound together with ropes in groups of four, and driven to the riverbed. Ahmed and the other men left behind could hear the shots as the others were executed by firing squad. Ahmed was in the seventh group. He and three others were tied between two wooden stakes and then the firing squad shot each man twice. Ahmed was shot in the abdomen and ankle and lost consciousness. Soldiers untied him and threw him into a mass grave below. When Ahmed woke up, finding himself under the dead bodies of men he had known, he did not realize at first that he had survived. But he managed to climb out from under the bodies and escape.



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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."*