

U.S. military contractor ordered to pay \$42 million to Iraqis tortured at Abu Ghraib prison



Washington, November 15 (RHC)-- An American military contractor has been obliged by a federal jury to pay \$42 million to three former Iraqi detainees who were tortured at the notorious US-run Abu Ghraib prison near the capital Baghdad following the 2003 invasion of the Arab country.

The ruling has ended a 15-year legal battle over the role of Virginia-based contractor CACI International, whose employees worked at Abu Ghraib in the west of Baghdad, in acts of torture that occurred at the the facility in 2003 and 2004.

Holding CACI International liable, the jury awarded plaintiffs Suhail Al Shimari, a middle school principal, Asa'ad Zuba'e, a fruit vendor, and Salah Al-Ejaili, a journalist, \$3mn each in compensatory damages and \$11mn each in punitive damages.

According to plaintiff filings in the federal court, each of the detainees was held at the Baghdad prison's "hard site," where CACI workers had directed US soldiers to abuse the prisoners to prepare them for interrogation.

The three former detainees testified that they had been subjected to beatings, sexual abuse, forced nudity and other cruel treatment at Abu Ghraib, stressing that CACI was complicit because its interrogators conspired with military police to "soften up" detainees for questioning with harsh treatment.

"Today is a big day for me and for justice," said Al-Ejaili, who traveled to the US to testify in person. "I've waited a long time for this day. This victory isn't only for the three plaintiffs in this case against a corporation. This victory is a shining light for everyone who has been oppressed and a strong warning to any company or contractor practicing different forms of torture and abuse."

The lengthy legal wrangling dates back to 2008, when the lawsuit was initially lodged in the Eastern District of Virginia amid multiple attempts by CACI to have the case dismissed.

A dozen military personnel were convicted of criminal charges for their involvement but Tuesday's verdict marks the first time private contractors were found liable for torture at Abu Ghraib. On March 20, 2003, the U.S. and Britain invaded Iraq in blatant violation of international law and under the pretext of finding weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) but no such weapons were ever discovered in Iraq.

More than one million Iraqis were killed as the result of the US-led invasion, and subsequent occupation of the country, according to the California-based investigative organization Project Censored.

[SOURCE: REUTERS]

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