

Inquiry shows UK soldiers executed Afghan boys younger than 16



London, January 10 (RHC)-- British special forces executed Afghan boys "younger than 16" during operations in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2013, a public inquiry has found. The allegation is contained in redacted evidence from former soldiers heard by the inquiry into alleged extrajudicial killings by special forces in Afghanistan's Helmand.

The inquiry focused on the activities of an SAS unit, referred to as UKSF1 in the inquiry documents, during so-called “deliberate detention operations” which lawyers for bereaved Afghan families say resulted in the deaths of more than 80 people.

According to soldiers' testimonies which were heard in closed sessions last year and published on the inquiry's website on Wednesday, SAS units were handed a "golden pass to get away with murder" in Afghanistan.

During the raids, “any man capable of picking up a weapon or any very young man capable of picking up a weapon” was targeted, the soldiers said. Asked whether this included youths “as young as 16”, one soldier replied, “Or younger. One hundred percent!”

Another soldier said weapons were sometimes placed alongside the bodies of people killed to give the impression that they had posed a threat when they were shot. The soldier also testified about an incident in which a pillow was placed over the head of someone who was then killed with a pistol.

“I suppose what shocked me most wasn't the execution of potential members of the Taliban, which was of course wrong and illegal, but it was more the age and the methods and, you know, the details of things like pillows.”

One SAS commander recalled that the commander of an Afghan special forces unit had complained to him about British soldiers being responsible for the “assassination of innocents”.

Emailed testimonies recounted that detained Afghans had been allowed to return unguarded into compounds and subsequently shot dead after having been reported as re-emerging with guns or grenades.

The public inquiry also found that two Afghan adults were shot dead by SAS forces in August 2012 while they were sleeping. Hussain Uzbekzai and Ruqia Mullah Muhammad Haleem, both 24, were tragically killed while sleeping outside in the courtyard with their preschool-age children.

Barrister Richard Hermer KC, representing the families of victims in the inquiry, asserted that such incidents amounted to war crimes committed by British soldiers.

When Mansour Aziz, Uzbekzai's brother, returned home, he discovered the horrifying scene of his brother and sister-in-law's bodies, while their children had been evacuated for urgent medical treatment.

“Even to this day, they are grieving the incident that happened to us and they are depressed. They are wondering why that incident happened to us,” Aziz said. “We are asking for the court to listen to these children and bring justice.”

The testimonies and evidence presented suggest that the SAS may have been conducting a campaign of murder, potentially constituting a war crime and a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions.

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