



HRSP NEWSLETTER

U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Division, Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section

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GAMBIAN MAN INDICTED ON TORTURE CHARGES

A Gambian man previously residing in Denver, Colorado was arrested on June 11, 2020 for torture charges stemming from his actions specifically intended to inflict severe physical pain and suffering on individuals in his custody and control in The Gambia in 2006.

An indictment was returned on June 2 and unsealed on June 11 charging Michael Sang Correa, 41, a national of The Gambia, with one count of conspiracy to commit torture and six counts of inflicting torture on specific individuals. Correa made his first court appearance on the charges on June 11 before U.S. Magistrate Judge N. Reid Neureiter in the District of Colorado.

“Michael Correa allegedly committed heinous acts of violence against victim after victim in a brutal effort to coerce confessions from suspected coup plotters in The Gambia,” said Assistant Attorney General Brian A. Benzowski of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division. “These charges underscore that the United States will not be a safe haven for perpetrators of torture and that human rights violators will be held accountable and brought to justice.”

“As federal prosecutors, our mission is to seek out injustice and to hold accountable those who perpetuate it, regardless of where it occurs,” said U.S. Attorney Jason R. Dunn of the District of Colorado. “With this arrest, we are not only holding accountable a man who has allegedly committed horrific acts of torture against his own people, but demonstrating to the people of The Gambia, and indeed the entire world, that the United States stands for the rule of law and against those who abuse human rights.”

“Michael Correa’s case is another example of our commitment to pursue those who attempt to evade accountability for their actions by fleeing to the United States,” said Assistant Director David C. Shaw of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), National Security Investigations Division, who oversees the Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Center. “HSI will continue to investigate perpetrators of torture, genocide, and other war crimes to ensure the United States does not serve as a safe haven for human rights violators.”

The indictment alleges that in 2006, Correa, a former member of a Gambian armed unit known as the Junglers, conspired with others to commit torture against individuals suspected of plotting a failed coup attempt against then-President Yahya Jammeh, and that he inflicted torture on six victims. The Junglers were comprised of individuals who had been selected from the ranks of The Gambia Armed Forces (GAF) but operated outside the regular GAF chain of command. The Junglers received orders from then-President Yahya Jammeh and answered to him.

In March 2006, the Jammeh government learned that individuals within The Gambia were attempting to overthrow the Jammeh government. The Jammeh government reacted by arresting numerous individuals believed to have been part of plotting the attempt to overthrow the Jammeh government. Individuals who were arrested were taken to a prison known as Mile 2 Prison and to the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) Headquarters to be interrogated about their role in the coup attempt, and were subjected to severe physical and mental abuses at NIA Headquarters.

The indictment alleges that during this time frame, in March and April 2006, the defendant and his co-conspirators severely and repeatedly beat their victims with their fists, feet, boots, and objects including plastic pipes, wires, and branches. The co-conspirators sometimes covered the victims' heads with plastic bags, restricting their ability to breathe, and subjected some victims to electrocution on various parts of their bodies. The indictment further alleges that one victim was suspended over the ground in a rice bag and beaten severely by the co-conspirators. Others had molten plastic or acid dripped on their bodies.

The charges and allegations in the indictment are merely accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

HSI Denver is leading the investigation of this case with support from HSI agents in Dakar, Senegal as well as personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Banjul and the FBI Legal Attaché in Dakar. The Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Center (HRVWCC) significantly supported the case. Established in 2009, the HRVWCC furthers the government's efforts to identify, locate, and prosecute human rights abusers in the United States, including those who are known or suspected to have participated in persecution, war crimes, genocide, torture, extrajudicial killings, female genital mutilation, and the use or recruitment of child soldiers.

Trial Attorney Erin Cox and Senior Counsel Christina Giffin of the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section (HRSP) and Assistant U.S. Attorney Greg Holloway of the District of Colorado are prosecuting the case with the assistance of HRSP historian Dr. Christopher Hayden and with the support of the Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs. The department appreciates the assistance provided by the governments of The Gambia, the Netherlands, and Sweden in this investigation.

People with information about former human rights violators in the United States are urged to contact U.S. law enforcement: Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 1-800-347-2423 or online tip form at <http://www.ice.gov/exec/forms/hsi-tips/tips.asp>); and FBI's International Human Rights Unit tips form at <https://tips.fbi.gov>.

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