HRSP NEWSLETTER

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

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ACCUSED ETHIOPIAN WAR CRIMINAL "JOHN DOE" CONVICTED FOLLOWING WEEK-LONG JURY TRIAL

On October 11, 2013, Kefelegn Alemu Worku, also known as John Doe, was convicted by a federal jury in Denver, Colorado of unlawful procurement of citizenship, aggravated identity theft, and fraud and misuse of visas, based on evidence that he assumed the identity of another man to hide his past, enter the U.S., and become a U.S. citizen. During the week-long trial, federal prosecutors presented evidence that Worku persecuted, tortured, and murdered defenseless people in the late 1970s in Ethiopia during the "Red Terror." A handwritten document from Ethiopia, obtained by federal investigators, indicates Alemu Worku was tried in absentia and sentenced to hang for war crimes. Several of the victims Worku tortured testified at trial and identified Worku as the person responsible for savage beatings and bloody executions. During the trial Worku sat with his back to the witnesses as they testified, until ordered by the Court to turn around so that his victims could identify him.

"Although no order of a U.S. Court can undo the crimes perpetrated by the defendant in Ethiopia, this trial offered Alemu Worku's victims the opportunity to speak the truth bravely for all to hear and to see that a measure of justice would be done, at long last," said John Walsh, U.S. Attorney for the District of Colorado. "I would like to recognize the outstanding work of Homeland Security Investigations Special Agent Jeff Lembke, Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Lily Alves, and lead prosecutor Assistant U.S. Attorney Brenda Taylor, who worked diligently and with great purpose and skill. In the end, their efforts and the courage of the victims who testified have ensured that Alemu Worku is no longer able to hide 'in plain sight'." The investigation was developed by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Human Rights Violator and War Crimes Center.

As a result of the conviction, U.S. District Court Judge John L. Kane immediately stripped Worku of his unlawfully obtained citizenship. Sentencing is scheduled before Judge Kane on December 19, 2013. Worku faces up to 22 years in federal prison.

People with information about former human rights violators in the United States are urged to contact U.S. law enforcement: HRSP, hrsptips@usdoj.gov or 1-800-813-5863; ICE, 1-866-DHS-2-ICE (1-800-347-2423) or complete its online tip form; and FBI's Genocide War Crimes Unit, tip form at https://tips.fbi.gov/.

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