

United Kingdom/Kenya: Mau Mau Torture Hearing Concludes in London

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ABSTRACT

At the Royal Courts of Justice building in London, veterans from Kenya's Mau Mau uprising, an anti-colonial movement, are gearing up for what they hope will be the final chapter in a 50-year struggle.

FULL TEXT

Britain's High Court has wrapped up a hearing on whether a case involving torture in colonial-era Kenya can go to trial. Nearly 50 years ago amidst Kenya's struggle for independence, a group known as Mau Mau launched a guerrilla war against colonial authorities. Hundreds of thousands of Mau Mau, or those accused of being Mau Mau, were detained and tortured at the hands of the colonial administration.

At the Royal Courts of Justice building in London, veterans from Kenya's Mau Mau uprising, an anti-colonial movement, are gearing up for what they hope will be the final chapter in a 50-year struggle. They are suing the British government for torture they suffered in colonial Kenya.

The Foreign Office has acknowledged that abuses occurred at the hands of the Kenyan colonial authorities. However, it claims liability was transferred to the Kenyan government upon independence in 1963.

George Morara is the program officer at the Kenya Human Rights Commission, which is spearheading the case. He told reporters the Foreign Office argues that too much time has passed to sustain a fair trial.

"Most of those people who would have come before court to give evidence have died and the ones who are still alive have a poor recollection of those events," said Morara.

Though many of the victims have died, thousands of Kenyans have come forward citing unlawful detention and acts of torture. For this hearing, four Mau Mau veterans traveled from their homes in rural Kenya to testify in London.

One of the claimants, Jane Muthoni Mara, was accused of being a Mau Mau scout. At the age of 17 she was arrested and detained for three years.

"We were taken to the camps where we were beaten thoroughly," said Mara. "Soldiers stepped on my feet every day and bottles were inserted into my private parts."

At the end of the hearing, Justice Richard McCombe declared he would withhold his ruling until at least October. He will either dismiss the case or recommend it go to full trial.

"We are hoping that the young generation in England are realistic and will listen to us and it may even be that they apologize for what perhaps their fathers or forefathers did to the people of Kenya," said Gitu wa Kahengeri, the spokesperson for the Mau Mau War Veterans Association.

If the case goes to trial, the Mau Mau hope the British government will settle to avoid a long and expensive legal battle. - VOA

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