



HRSP NEWSLETTER

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

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Man Convicted of Torture and Exporting Weapons Parts and Related Services to Iraq

A federal jury convicted a Pennsylvania man on May 19 for numerous crimes, including the torture of an Estonian citizen in 2015 in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, in connection with the operation of an illegal weapons manufacturing plant in Kurdistan.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Ross Roggio, 54, of Stroudsburg, arranged for Kurdish soldiers to abduct and detain the victim at a Kurdish military compound where Roggio suffocated the victim with a belt, threatened to cut off one of his fingers, and directed Kurdish soldiers to repeatedly beat, tase, choke, and otherwise physically and mentally abuse the victim over a 39-day period. The victim was employed at a weapons factory that Roggio was developing in the Kurdistan region of Iraq that was intended to manufacture M4 automatic rifles and Glock 9mm pistols.

In connection with the weapons factory project, which included Roggio providing training to foreign persons in the operation, assembly, and manufacturing of the M4 automatic rifle, Roggio also illegally exported firearm parts that were controlled for export by the Departments of State and Commerce.

“Roggio brutally tortured another human being to prevent interference with his illegal activities,” said Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite, Jr. of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division. “Thanks to the courage of the victim and other witnesses, the hard work of U.S. law enforcement, and the assistance of Estonian authorities, he will now be held accountable for his cruelty.”

“Today’s guilty verdict demonstrates that Roggio’s brutal acts of directing and participating in the torture of an employee over the course of 39 days by Kurdish soldiers could not avoid justice,” said U.S. Attorney Gerard M. Karam for the Middle District of Pennsylvania. “We thank all the prosecutors and law enforcement agents who worked tirelessly to address these acts that occurred in Iraq.”

“Today’s milestone conviction is the result of the extraordinary courage of the victim, who came forward after the defendant inflicted unspeakable pain on him for more than a month,” said Assistant Director Luis Quesada of the FBI’s Criminal Investigative Division. “Torture is among the most heinous crimes the FBI investigates, and together with our partners at the Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Center, we will relentlessly pursue justice.”

“U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is firmly dedicated to pursuing those who commit human rights violations, like Roggio, to ensure perpetrators face justice for their atrocities,” said Deputy Director and Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director Tae D. Johnson of ICE. “Our investigators will continue to work tirelessly with government partners so these horrendous acts do not go without consequence.”

“The illegal export of firearms parts and tools from the United States often goes hand in hand with other criminal activities, such as the charge of torture on which the jury voted to convict the defendant,” said Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Carson of the Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS), Office of Export Enforcement, New York Field Office. “I commend our law enforcement colleagues for their dedication to bringing justice in this case.”

Roggio was convicted of torture, conspiracy to commit torture, conspiring to commit an offense against the United States, exporting weapons parts and services to Iraq without the approval of the Department of State, exporting weapons tools to Iraq without the approval of the Department of Commerce, smuggling goods, wire fraud, and money laundering. He is scheduled to be sentenced on Aug. 23 and faces a maximum sentence of life in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Roggio is the second defendant to be convicted of torture since the federal torture statute went into effect in 1994.

The FBI and HSI investigated the torture and were joined in investigating the export control violations related to the firearms manufacturing equipment by the Department of Commerce's BIS Office of Export Enforcement.

Trial Attorney Patrick Jasperse of the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section, Trial Attorney Scott A. Claffee of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Todd K. Hinkley for the Middle District of Pennsylvania are prosecuting the case. The Estonian Internal Security Service, the Justice Department's Office of International Affairs, and the Pennsylvania State Police also provided valuable assistance.

Members of the public who have information about human rights violators in the United States are urged to contact U.S. law enforcement through the FBI tip line at 1-800-CALL-FBI or the HSI tip line at 1-866-DHS-2-ICE, or complete the FBI online tip form or the ICE online tip form.

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