



SHURAT HADIN WINS \$338M JUDGMENT AGAINST SYRIA OVER KIDNAPPING OF AMERICANS BY KURDISH TERRORISTS



Chief District Court Judge Royce Lamberth ruled that Syria was vicariously liable for the PKK's 1991 kidnapping of a group of American biblical archeologists leading an excavation in Turkey. The Americans, who were searching to discover the location of the remains of the biblical Noah's Ark, were held hostage for 21 days before they finally were able to escape.

The families were represented by attorneys Robert Tolchin of New York and Nitsana Darshan-Leitner of Tel-Aviv. Darshan-Leitner is the director of the Shurat HaDin Law Center. The Court awarded the families \$38 million dollars in compensatory damages and levied a \$300 million punitive damages award against the Syrian government as well.

Marvin Wilson and the family of the deceased Ronald Wyatt brought the lawsuit against Syria alleging that Damascus had allowed the PKK to operate from Syrian territory, and provided financial support and training to the terrorist group. The civil action sought both compensation and punitive damages from Syria.

Marvin Wilson, one of the kidnapped Americans, stressed: "The news we received today of a successful ruling against Syria for their support of the PKK during the time of our 1991 kidnapping in Turkey was extremely exciting! After 12 years of anticipating that justice would be served, I hope this ruling will serve notice and be a deterrent to others that there is a penalty for complicity in taking American citizens as hostages. We truly appreciate the dedication and resolve given by the Shurat HaDin – Israel Law Center in litigating our case."

Mary Nell Lee, the wife of the late Ronald Wyatt, added: "I am so very grateful that the judge recognized the effects this kidnapping had on our families. Each of our lives was changed in ways that have continued until this day. My prayer is that all those who have suffered at the hands of terrorists, receive compensation such as we have been awarded. While it cannot erase the memories of the event, it can provide each person a sense of justice and closure. Hopefully, it will have an effect on the countries involved in supporting terrorist organizations and help them learn that they cannot get away with such horrendous behavior."

In Sept. 1991, Wilson and Wyatt traveled to Turkey as part of an archeological project to excavate a site near Mount Ararat, where according to the Old Testament, Noah's Ark is believed to have finally found land. Shortly after traveling near the Syrian border the Americans, along with others, were taken hostage by armed gunmen. For the next 21 days the captives were subjected to brutal treatment, forced 18 hour marches and repeatedly assaulted by their PKK captors. The terrorists made ransom demands to the Turkish and American governments.

In July 2001, plaintiffs filed a complaint against Syria pursuant to the Foreign Sovereign Immunity Act's terrorism exception, 28 U.S.C. § 1605A in the U.S. district court in Washington D.C.

In today's ruling, the Court wrote that: "the brutal character of the kidnapping in this case, the significant harm it caused both the hostage plaintiffs and their families, along with Syria's demonstrated and well known policy to encourage terrorism all merit an award of punitive damages."

According to Darshan-Leitner: "This is a groundbreaking ruling which finds that Syria was responsible for the crimes perpetrated by the PKK terror organization it sponsors. This ruling also points to an underlying fact: the free world will no longer stand idle while international crimes are committed and it will fight against those rogue regimes which support these heinous acts. Above all, the court found that this kidnapping was brutal and heinous, and involved threats of execution, torture, as well as marches through mountains and dense forests. It is therefore fitting that compensation should be in the millions not in the tens of thousands. These days Syria continues to commit crimes against those who oppose the regime, and Syria will pay."

Tolchin added: "Although the events that gave rise to this judgment took place a number of years ago, it is remarkable how little things have changed. Syria is still playing a proxy game creating terror, instability and mayhem via the PKK and Hizbollah. Hopefully with this judgment Syria will come to realize that there are financial consequences for its actions, while at the same time bringing some measure of comfort to the Wyatt and Wilson families for their ordeal."

The case is called Mary Nell Wyatt v. Syrian Arab Republic. Civil No. 08-502 (RCL)

[A copy of the district court opinion \(http://www.scribd.com/doc/117153791/Wyatt-v-Syrian-Arab-Republic-Opinion\)](http://www.scribd.com/doc/117153791/Wyatt-v-Syrian-Arab-Republic-Opinion)

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