

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR EXTRAORDINARY RENDITION AND TORTURE: THE CASE OF ABOU ELKASSIM BRITEL



Mr. Britel in 1997

“The wrong has been done, sadly. What I can ask now is some form of reparation, so that I can have a fresh start and try to forget, even if it won’t be easy . . . I want an apology; it is only fair to say that someone who has done something wrong must apologize.”

– Abou ElKassim Britel

Since September 11, 2001, over 135 people have been seized, abducted and tortured as part of the U.S. extraordinary rendition program. Abou ElKassim Britel is one of them.

Pakistani authorities arrested and detained Mr. Britel while he was traveling for business purposes in March 2002. An Italian citizen of Moroccan descent, Mr. Britel was beaten with a cricket bat, suspended from the walls of his cell for long periods, deprived of sleep for three days, and repeatedly threatened with worse torture, death, and the rape of female family members. Interrogations by Pakistani police and secret service agents were so violent that he required medical attention for a week afterward. After two months in Pakistani jails, Mr. Britel was handed over to the CIA.

Using a private aircraft based in North Carolina, U.S. agents secretly transported Mr. Britel to the notorious Temara prison in Morocco, where he was held for eight months in complete isolation. Other detainees were also tortured for the CIA at Temara. Blindfolded, handcuffed, and severely beaten all over his body during interrogations, he was deprived of sleep and adequate food and frequently threatened with greater pain, castration, sodomy with a bottle, and death. His whereabouts were never disclosed to his family, and he was denied the right to speak with an Italian consul. Released without charges in February 2003, he could not return to Italy, as his travel documents had been confiscated by the CIA during rendition. While he waited for Italy to issue new travel papers, he was continually pressured by Moroccan authorities to act as an informant.



N379P, operated by Aero Contractors to secretly transport Mr. Britel from Pakistan to Morocco

In May 2003, Mr. Britel received the documents and set out for Italy, but was re-arrested at the Moroccan border. He later learned that he was accused of involvement in a bombing that actually took place after this arrest. He was returned to Temara for four more months, where he was again interrogated, threatened, and tortured by Moroccan officials. Under torture, Mr. Britel signed a confession he was never permitted to read. The confession was used to convict him of terrorism at a trial that an Italian Embassy observer said was a sham. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison; on appeal, the sentence was reduced to nine years. After incarceration in four different Moroccan prisons, he was finally released in April 2011.

In 2007, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit on behalf of Mr. Britel and four other survivors of extraordinary rendition. The defendant, a private company called Jeppesen DataPlan, contracted with the CIA to plan logistics for rendition missions. But the U.S. government intervened, declaring that “state secrets” would be compromised, and the lawsuit died without a day in court for the plaintiffs.

The governments implicated in Mr. Britel’s abuse and torture are:

- * **Pakistan**, where he was seized and tortured;
- * The **United States**, whose officials and agents transferred him to the secret Temara prison in Morocco and orchestrated interrogations under torture;
- * **Morocco**, where he was tortured during his detention and convicted in a sham trial based on a tortured confession;
- * **Italy**, whose officials collaborated with the U.S. and perhaps other governments in his mistreatment, and failed to assist and protect him.



Mr. Britel in 2011

Since Mr. Britel’s extraordinary rendition, torture, and long imprisonment, each of these governments has failed to act in the interest of justice and in accordance with international human rights law, particularly the Convention Against Torture.

Today, Mr. Britel lives in Bergamo, Italy, with his wife. Still haunted by his experiences, he suffers from anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, amnesia, loss of concentration and visual acuity, limb weakness, and dizziness. No government has acknowledged wrongdoing in his ordeal, and so former friends and acquaintances avoid him and his wife, who suffers as well. Recently, Mr. Britel described his circumstances since the rendition as “no longer having a life.” What he most wants and needs is official recognition of the severe harm he has wrongfully endured. In addition, he seeks rehabilitation and reintegration into day-to-day life in his community.

Like many others victimized by the U.S. program of extraordinary rendition and torture, Mr. Britel has specifically asked for an apology. While there will never be an adequate remedy for what he has suffered, public acknowledgment and a formal apology by the relevant governments may help, and is essential as a step toward restoring the rule of law.

The campaign “TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR EXTRAORDINARY RENDITION AND TORTURE: The Case Of Abou ElKassim Britel” was started by North Carolina Stop Torture Now and the team of Professor Deborah Weissman and law students at the University of North Carolina School of Law in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

We seek official acknowledgement, apologies, and restitution for Mr. Britel for three reasons: (1) simple humanity requires it, (2) Americans do not condone the terrible human rights abuses perpetrated in our names, and (3) these actions are essential to ensure that such wrongs never happen again. Along with Mr. Britel, at least 135 others suffered extraordinary rendition by the CIA post-9/11. Acknowledgement and justice are long overdue, and we should begin now.

For more information & to endorse the campaign:
North Carolina Stop Torture Now, www.ncstoptorturenw.org

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