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Federal court in Denver rejects appeal by notorious Ethiopian prison guard

A former member of the Marxist Derg junta, Kefelgn Alemu Worku could be deported to Ethiopia

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PUBLISHED: July 13, 2018 at 2:11 p.m. | UPDATED: July 13, 2018 at 3:23 p.m.

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Kefelgn Alemu Worku (Provided by federal authorities)



The 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver has dismissed an appeal by a 62-year-old man who claims his false identification as an Ethiopian prison guard who killed and tortured dozens of people led to an unfair sentencing on an unrelated U.S. immigration fraud count.

In a series of appeals and motions, the court dismissed his first appeal after finding that [Kefelgn Alemu Worku, 62](#), failed to prove his case, rejected Worku's motion to reconsider, and on Friday denied his second appeal on the grounds of ineffective assistance of counsel.

The appeal court ruling said Senior Judge John Kane of the U.S. District Court in Denver was not in error when he allowed prosecutors to mention his prison atrocities.

"The trial judge's knowledge of defendant's Ethiopian murder conviction was not extrajudicial, but was based on the prosecution's introduction of this evidence at sentencing to support its argument that a lengthy sentence was warranted," the appeals court said.

A former member of the Marxist Derg junta, Worku could be deported to Ethiopia, where he was sentenced in November 2000 to death for torturing 101 people to death in the Higher 15 prison in the late 1970s.


In Kane's courtroom, a jury found Worku guilty in October of 2014 of lying on immigration documents and stealing another man's identity to gain entry to the United States. Worku had lived a quiet life in Aurora for years until one of his victims recognized him.

During his sentencing of Worku, Kane said the U.S. is not a haven for people committing heinous acts against humanity like Argentina became for Nazis after World War II. The judge revoked the citizenship status of Worku, who will likely be deported to Ethiopia following his sentence.

During the trial, Ethiopian immigrant Abebech "Abby" Demissie testified that Worku struck her with an AK-47, causing her to vomit for days. In another instance, Worku, after executing several prisoners, ordered other prisoners to drink their blood or clean their blood off the floor with their tongues, Demissie said.

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Kirk Mitchell is a general assignment reporter at The Denver Post who focuses on criminal justice stories. He began working at the newspaper in 1998, after writing for newspapers in Mesa, Ariz., and Twin Falls, Idaho, and The Associated Press in Salt Lake City. Mitchell first started writing the Cold Case blog in Fall 2007, in part because Colorado has more than 1,400 unsolved homicides.

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