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U.S. District Court Grants American Held Prisoner in Iran \$63 million in Damages Against the Islamic Republic of Iran

WASHINGTON, DC (October 2, 2017) – Judge Ellen Huvelle of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia has granted the motion of Amir Hekmati, an American held prisoner in Iran, for default against the Islamic Republic of Iran and awarded Mr. Hekmati over \$63 million in compensatory, economic and punitive damages. Huvelle issued her decision Sept. 29th.

Hekmati was arrested in Iran in August 2011 while visiting his ailing grandmother. Hekmati, a former U.S. Marine, was taken hostage and initially sentenced to death. Hekmati ultimately was sentenced to 10 years in the infamous Evin prison. Hekmati spent over one year in solitary confinement, four months of that on death row. Throughout his nearly five years at Evin, Hekmati endured continuous beatings and other severe physical and psychological abuse. He was released in January 2016, as part of a prisoner exchange between Iran and the United States.

In the 34-page opinion, the court found that Hekmati was entitled to \$31,748,179 in compensatory and economic damages. Determining that “Iran’s conduct was sufficiently outrageous to warrant the imposition of punitive damages,” the court awarded Hekmati punitive damages in an equal amount.

“My family, and I endured this injustice for nearly half a decade, the effects of which will remain with us for the rest of our lives,” said Hekmati. “The Iranian government detained me for political motives and knew full well I had committed no crime in their country. Yet they imprisoned and tortured me continuously for nearly 5 years, while subjecting me to threats of death by hanging, physical torture, psychological torment, and solitary confinement. I’m grateful to the court for giving us some closure, helping to restore our dignity and holding Iran accountable.”

“They do everything they can to hurt you and break you down,” Hekmati said. “If it wasn’t for my family, I wouldn’t have made it.”

Hekmati’s sister Sarah quit her job and spent years working to try to improve Hekmati’s conditions and obtain his release.

“The court’s decision is important because it says to Iran and the world that what Iran did was wrong and that they will be held accountable. It is another step to allow me and my family to try to move forward with our lives,” he said.

Scott Gilbert, Hekmati's attorney, said: "We are pleased with the court's thoughtful and well-documented decision. We now will initiate the process of service on Iran. We will do everything in our power to ensure that Amir's claim is paid in full."

"It is highly ironic," added Mr. Gilbert, "that we go to such extraordinary lengths to assure that Iran is accorded full due process under the law. We translate all documents into Farsi, and the State Department serves the documents on Iran through Switzerland. Each time we go through this process, it takes months. We do this for Iran, which has no respect for law, life or human dignity. But we do it because America is built on the rule of law. And this is what distinguishes us from them, and it is what Amir and all our other military personnel are fighting for."

Gilbert LLP is a Washington-based law firm specializing in litigation and strategic risk management, insurance recovery and complex dispute resolution. Its founder and chairman Scott Gilbert represented the Hekmati family in connection with Amir's imprisonment and the Iran prisoner exchange. He also represented Alan Gross during his imprisonment in Cuba and facilitated the U.S.-Cuba accord reached in December 2014.

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