



Narita immigration officials found at fault in Ghanaian's death

NEWS & OPINION



by Alec Jordan

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A district court in Japan found fault with immigration officials over their use of excessive force that led to the death of a Ghanaian man while he was being deported from the country four years ago.



In a landmark ruling, the Tokyo District Court **ordered** the central government to pay 5 million yen (\$49,000) in compensation to the family of Abubakar Awudu Suraj.

Suraj's Japanese wife **sued** the central government and had initially sought 130 million yen in damages from the state.

The court determined that immigration officials **caused** Suraj's death by unlawfully using excessive force to subdue the deportee even though he was not resisting detainment.

Suraj was caught overstaying his visa in 2006 and was ordered to be deported. Prior to his deportation in March 2010, immigration officials reportedly bound Suraj by his arms and legs, stuffed a towel in his mouth and bent him forcibly forward, cutting off his air supply.

The officials said later that they had no choice but to restrain Suraj because they were concerned he might put up a violent struggle.

“Their effort to restrain him crossed the line to such extent it can never be defended as necessary and

reasonable,” presiding Judge Hisaki Kobayashi said, rejecting claims by the state that Suraj’s sudden death was caused by an irregular heartbeat from a pre-existing heart ailment.

“Breathing restrictions due to the gag and the limitations on movement of the chest and diaphragm caused by being forced into a posture of having his face near his knees led to breathing difficulties that caused death by suffocation,” the verdict read.

Although the court awarded far less in damages than the plaintiffs sought, the

court slammed the officials' actions as "dangerous" and "illegal."

The ruling came as a relief to Suraj's 52-year-old wife. "I'm really glad what they did to my husband was found illegal. That was a huge load off my mind," she said.

"I demand an official apology from the Justice Ministry and sincerely hope it will improve the way foreigners are deported," she added.

By Maesie Bertumen

Image: "Immigration" by [lcars/Flickr](#)

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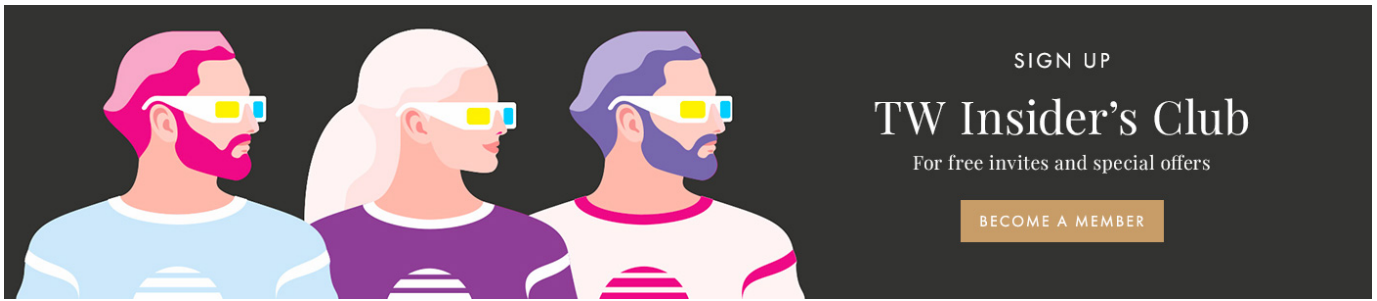
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