

Multinationals appeal in apartheid compensation case

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Five major multinational companies have appealed in a compensation case going through the American courts in which they are accused of aiding and abetting apartheid. The law suit, which was brought by Khulumani Support Group in 2002 against IBM, Daimler, Ford, General Motors and the Rheinmetall Group, accuses the car companies of knowing that their vehicles would be used to suppress South African dissent and computer manufacturers of knowing their goods were being used to assist in the removal of black South Africans rights. The claimants lawyers are asking for around \$400bn (£248bn) in compensation.

The companies assert that the US Court has no authority over events in other countries, despite the US court ruling that the case could proceed under the Alien Tort Claims Act. The act allows foreign nationals to prosecute on human rights grounds in the US courts.

In 2008 the US Supreme Court was unable to hear a request to block the case as four justices had interests in the accused companies. Since then the South African government has changed its position on the case due to a ruling by the courts which reduced the number of companies involved in the case to five.

The trade union federation COSATU, along with many other civil society organisations, have given their support to the case and the contribution that it makes to the reconstruction of South Africa. "The customised administrative and technological assistance provided by multinational enterprises facilitated the commission of the regime's crimes... which could not have occurred without the provision of data-collection and processing systems, crowd-control hardware and vehicles, which were designed and maintained to meet the regime's repressive needs."