U.S. Court Revives Indonesia Case Against Exxon

NEW YORK (AP) — A federal appeals court is reviving a lawsuit by Indonesians who want Exxon Mobil Corp. held responsible for deadly attacks by security forces more than a decade ago.

A three-judge panel of the U.S. District Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit said Friday in a 2-1 ruling that a trial judge was wrong to dismiss the case two years ago. The court said corporations can be sued under a federal law that allows U.S. jurisdiction over alleged crimes committed outside the country.

Judge Judith Rogers said companies can be held liable under the Alien Tort Statute, enacted in 1789. Despite Exxon's claims of corporate immunity, Rogers wrote that the oil giant can be sued "for torts based on heinous conduct allegedly committed by its agents in violation of the law of nations." In legal terms a tort is a wrongful act that results in injury to people or property.

The ruling reopens a case brought by 15 Indonesian villagers who said Indonesian soldiers raped and killed people at a natural gas site in Aceh province operated by Exxon. The villagers claim that Exxon retained the soldiers as security guards for the natural gas facility even though company officials knew the Indonesian army had committed human rights abuses in the past.

Exxon says those claims are "baseless" and is reviewing the court's decision.

"While conducting its business in Indonesia, ExxonMobil has worked for generations to improve the quality of life in Aceh through employment of local workers, provision of health services and extensive community investment," Exxon spokesman Patrick McGinn said.

Exxon shares fell 5 cents to $82.31 in afternoon trading.

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