

Filmmaker Sues L.A. County and State Officials Claiming “False Imprisonment”

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‘Not Forgotten’ director Dror Soref — who had been accused of a Ponzi scheme before being fully exonerated — filed a \$40 million lawsuit claiming false imprisonment and bias.

A filmmaker who had been falsely accused of a Ponzi scheme in raising money for an independent movie is suing a slew of state agencies and officials claiming they are responsible for destroying his reputation and his career when they falsely imprisoned him for five months while demanding an unreasonably high bail before setting him free.

Dror Soref filed his \$40 million lawsuit Wednesday, claiming his initial \$2.7 million bail — more than a typical accused murderer would receive, his attorney noted at the time — was the result of bias, given he was deemed a “flight risk” due to the fact he is an Israeli national as well as a U.S. citizen.

The charges against Soref were eventually dropped, but not before he was incarcerated for about 140 days while his partner at the time, Michelle Seward, was arrested and immediately released on her own recognizance despite identical charges against her, according to the lawsuit.

Soref and Seward formed a partnership to make the film *Not Forgotten*, a movie Soref directed, while it was Seward’s job to raise funding for the film. *Not Forgotten*, released in theaters in 2009, was reviewed positively in *The Hollywood Reporter*, as noted in the lawsuit filed Wednesday by the Law Offices of Etan Z. Lorant in Woodland Hills, Calif.

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Soref's attorneys argue that not only did their client not commit the crimes he was accused of but that he was also improperly arrested and charged in 2015 partially because the statute of limitations had run out "on the overwhelming number of counts."

Soref began his career directing music videos for "Weird Al" Yankovic; he also directed Peter O'Toole in *The Seventh Coin* and maintained a 25-year relationship with Paramount Pictures. Soref was also CEO of commercial production company Orbit Productions, directed episodes of *The Power Rangers* TV show and co-produced *Basic* with John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson, though he has found it impossible to get work since his arrest and the resulting publicity, which includes numerous news stories.

Soref's criminal defense attorney at the time, Bryan Altman of the Altman Law Group, argued that Soref was not culpable for the alleged crime, as the judge later confirmed. It was Seward given her role to deal with all financial matter relating to investors, though she was set free immediately, while he languished in custody. The lawsuit notes that many of the 140 investors never met Soref, only Seward.

Citing a conversation between the court and Renee Cartaya of the District Attorney's Office, the lawsuit says it was acknowledged Soref had a wife and three children living in California at the time and that there was no indication he had traveled internationally for 10-20 years, yet Cartaya argued he was a flight risk based on "ties to Israel." Soref's attorneys now claim such an argument is a 'discrimination based on national origin.'

The lawsuit also says Cartaya and others "were in possession of substantial amounts of evidence that had not been made available to (Soref), including summaries of interviews from dozens of complaining witnesses, all of whom confirmed that all alleged misrepresentations came from co-defendant Seward and that they had had no substantive pre-investment communications whatsoever with (Soref)."

It also states that Soref, a U.S. citizen who resided in Los Angeles County for 40 years and was the adoptive father of a young child, "spent approximately 140 days in jail on charges that should never have been brought because the statute of limitations had run, had no legal merit, and because an unreasonable bail was set, for no other reason than that he had ties to Israel."

Soref is suing the State of California Department of Business Oversight, the California Department of Insurance, the County of Los Angeles and several individuals involved in the case at the time, including Cartaya, Jackie Lacey of the D.A.'s office, Insurance Commissioner Dave Jones, Commissioner of Business Oversight Jan Lynn Owen, attorney Blaine Noblett and insurance investigator June Arago.