

Baha Mousa Public Inquiry

The Secretary of State for Defence formally set up the Baha Mousa Public Inquiry on 1 August 2008 as an independent Inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005. On 3 October an invitation to tender through the DES ISS for the provision of IT and communication services for the Inquiry was issued.



In a written statement given in Parliament on 14 May 2008 the Secretary of State for Defence announced that there would be a

public inquiry into the death of Baha Mousa, an Iraqi civilian who died whilst in detention at 1st Battalion, The Queen's Lancashire Regiment Battle Group Main (BG Main) facility in Basra, Iraq in September 2003. He described that death as a disturbing incident: not just because a man died in the custody of British soldiers but because an investigation by the Royal Military Police and a subsequent Court Martial highlighted further important questions that needed to be answered.

The Inquiry is established under the Inquiries Act 2005 and is chaired by the Right Honourable Sir William Gage, a retired Court of Appeal judge. His terms of reference are:

"To investigate and report on the circumstances surrounding the death of Baha Mousa and the treatment of those detained with him, taking account of the investigations which have already taken place, in particular where responsibility lay for approving the practice of conditioning detainees by any members of the 1st Battalion, The Queen's Lancashire Regiment in Iraq in 2003, and to make recommendations."

The high profile nature of the Inquiry, its press and TV coverage worldwide and the sensitive nature of the information required throughout the duration of a two year Public Inquiry dictated that a competent full service provider with proven track record in delivering multiple skills quickly, accurately and efficiently was essential to the credibility of the Inquiry.

Akhter Computers plc were finally chosen as the prime contractor most likely to be able to fulfil and respond quickly to what was both an extremely wide set of required IT skills and an extremely short timescale in which to design, procure, implement, deploy, train and support the Inquiry's entire IT and communications needs. The company's project team were responsible for managing and interfacing with DE&S ISS ICS commercial contracts team, DE&S ISS Project Manager (Circo), Merrill



Legal (secure witness databases), BT (Defence Restricted LAN Interface [RLI]), CJSM (legal secure mail), Chambers, Secretary to the Inquiry, Solicitors (local & remote) and all vendors to ensure the timely delivery of fully functional services in time for the preliminary hearings in Q1 2009

Akhter was expected to design and implement networks capable of meeting prevailing security policy standards for GSI alongside MoD security policies; of providing secure email systems to cjsm, gsi, and MoD standards both within the Inquiry premises and externally to the judiciary, Barristers, Solicitors, MoD staff and other commercial organisations). This entailed re-siting all existing equipment, services & telecoms from the Old Land Registry Building , London to Finlaison House, Furnival Street, London during December 2008 with no operational downtime for the legal teams.

Akhter designed and provided all aspects of the infrastructure from servers, networking, firewalling, communications, telephony systems and application hosting all of which were designed for 100% failover, were dual homed or provided with full redundancy to achieve a guaranteed System Availability of 99.995%

Akhter provided the new services pre-configured, encrypted, scripted and ready for use by persons of differing IT knowledge and experience; Akhter were required to provide and support multiple Server based Data and Database applications (including internally and externally secure hosted witness databases); Akhter were required to provide the highest quality systems and multimedia facilities for the Courtroom; Akhter were required to co-ordinate and manage the audio and visual subcontractors, translator facilities, pressroom IT facilities and Internet Café Public Access.

In addition Akhter had to provide first to fourth line support on all equipment on a same day fix for all IT other than "Court in Session" where a one hour fix was required, in addition to providing resident support for staff both in and out of Hearing Sessions for the duration of the Inquiry.

Lee Hughes CBE, Secretary to the Inquiry, was noted as saying:

"The project team at Akhter delivered on time, provided competent and effective staff and solutions for the Inquiry's purposes, overcame many obstacles, without incurring time delays, to provide what is now accepted as the first purpose built "All Electronic Courtroom" in the country. Their service response, competency and capabilities have shown throughout the Inquiry that they were most definitely the best choice and we would have no hesitation in recommending them for projects of this nature."