



Department of Justice

**FOR
IMMEDIATE
RELEASE**

**Thursday,
May 15, 2008**

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**CRM
(202) 514-2007
TDD (202) 514-1888**

Member of Afghan Taliban Convicted in U.S. Court on Narco-terrorism and Drug Charges

WASHINGTON – A member of an Afghan Taliban cell was convicted today by a jury in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia on charges of narcotics distribution and narco-terrorism, Assistant Attorney General for the Criminal Division Alice S. Fisher announced. The conviction represents the first time a defendant has been convicted in U.S. federal court of narco-terrorism since the statute was enacted in March 2006.

Khan Mohammed, from the Nangarhar Province of Afghanistan, was investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) for weapons and narcotics offenses. The investigation revealed that Mohammed was part of a Taliban plan to obtain rockets to attack U.S. military and Afghan civilian personnel at Jalalabad Airfield in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. A cooperating witness working with the DEA met with Mohammed on several occasions to plan the rocket attack. Evidence presented at trial established that Mohammed had previously engaged in similar rocket attacks against other Afghan targets. During the investigation, Mohammed also sold opium and heroin that he knew was intended for importation into the United States.

“The Department of Justice will continue to use every available legal tool to bring to justice those who help fund terrorist activities by trafficking in illegal drugs,” said Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher. “I would like to thank the DEA, our law enforcement partners in Afghanistan and the federal prosecutors for their hard work on this case.”

“As an enemy of the United States, Khan Mohammed intended to ship heroin to the United States and use profits from that trade to assist the Taliban,” said DEA Acting Administrator Michele M. Leonhart. “A

dangerous double threat, Kahn Mohammed purchased rockets to attack American and coalition soldiers who were risking their lives to stabilize Afghanistan. The conviction of Kahn Mohammed puts an end to this source of poison and violence.”

A grand jury first returned an indictment against Mohammed on Dec. 13, 2006, charging him with distributing opium and heroin, knowing that it would be imported into the United States. A superseding indictment returned on Jan. 23, 2008, also charged Mohammed with engaging in drug trafficking knowing or intending to provide something of pecuniary value to a terrorist or terrorist organization. Mohammed was brought to the United States on Nov. 5, 2007. Mohammed faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 20 years and a maximum of life in prison. A sentencing hearing is scheduled before the Honorable Colleen Kollar-Kotelly on Oct. 10, 2008.

The case was prosecuted by Deputy Chief of Litigation Julius Rothstein, Trial Attorney Matthew Stiglitz and paralegal Arianne Tice of the Criminal Division’s Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section. The investigation was led by the DEA’s Kabul Country Office and DEA’s FAST team in Afghanistan with support from DEA’s Special Operations Division in the United States and in close cooperation with Afghan law enforcement.

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