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TWO DEFENDANTS CHARGED IN FLORIDA WITH PROVIDING MATERIAL SUPPORT TO TERRORISTS

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Attorney General John Ashcroft, Assistant Attorney General Christopher A. Wray of the Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Marcos Daniel Jiménez of the Southern District of Florida, FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III and Michael J. Garcia, the Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, announced today that a federal grand jury in Miami has indicted two individuals on charges of providing material support to terrorist activities overseas.

The 10-count superseding indictment returned today charges Adham Amin Hassoun, a/k/a "Abu Sayyaf," and Mohamed Hesham Youssef, a/k/a/ "Abu Turab," with conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists, in violation of 18 U.S.C. Sections 2339A and 371, and providing material support, in violation of 18 U.S.C. 2339A.

Today's indictment includes eight additional counts against Hassoun, a Palestinian national living in Florida, on charges of unlawful possession of a firearm, making false statements, perjury and obstruction of immigration court proceedings. Hassoun is currently in custody on these prior charges. Youssef is in custody in Egypt serving a sentence for other terrorist activities.

The indictment alleges that Hassoun engaged in recruiting and fundraising to send individuals, including Youssef and an unnamed, unindicted co-conspirator, to overseas conflicts for the purposes of fighting jihad and supporting a terrorist agenda. The indictment alleges that the defendants conspired to and did provide material support to terrorists for violent jihad in specific locations outside the United States - all for the purpose of opposing existing governments and civilian factions and establishing states under strict Islamic law, or Sharia.

As part of the conspiracy, Hassoun allegedly wrote a series of checks over several years - from 1994 to late 2001 - to unindicted co-conspirators and organizations including the Holy Land Foundation and the Global Relief Foundation, to be used to support violent jihad. Both organizations have alleged ties to terrorism financing. In July 2004, the Holy Land Foundation and seven of its leaders were indicted on charges of providing material support to Hamas, a foreign terrorist organization. The Treasury Department has designated the Global Relief Foundation as an organization that funneled money for terrorist-related activities.

According to the indictment, the defendants also participated in a series of coded conversations from

1996 through 2000 suggesting participation in violent jihad in Somalia, Kosovo, Chechnya and Afghanistan. For example, during one such coded conversation in September 1996, Youssef, who was in Egypt, allegedly told Hassoun that he was “ready for trade immediately,” and Hassoun responded: “by God, there is now trade in Somalia... get yourself ready to go down there to see,” and clarified that “there is jihad” in Somalia.

The indictment further alleges that Hassoun supported the travel and jihad training of an unindicted co-conspirator, a U.S. citizen who allegedly “went to the area of Usama,” according to a September 2000 conversation between Hassoun and Youssef.

“This indictment alleges that an individual living here in the United States, enjoying all the freedoms that our society has to offer, was secretly plotting to support murder and terror being perpetrated by violent jihadists overseas,” said Attorney General John Ashcroft. “It is imperative that our government, through vigorous investigation and prosecution, remove the threat posed by those who would support such terrorist activities.”

“This case highlights one of the most important aspects of the Department’s role in the war on terrorism: the ability to use information gathered through intelligence methods along with information from traditional law enforcement methods to build a comprehensive criminal prosecution in the national security context,” said Assistant Attorney General Wray. “Because the ‘wall’ that restricted such information sharing in the past has been torn down since September 11, prosecutors were able to piece together the full scope of the alleged violent jihad conspiracy and present these charges in a court of law.”

“This case underscores our commitment to dismantle, disrupt, and bring to justice terrorists and those who support them,” said U.S. Attorney Jiménez. “This prosecution is a significant part of our ongoing efforts to weed out terrorists and their supporters in South Florida. The public should rest assured that we are working very hard to protect our communities from the threats posed by terrorists and their organizations.”

FBI Director Mueller said, “The success of this case can be attributed to three things, an investigative strategy that integrates the use of intelligence and criminal tools to disrupt terrorism-related activities, a high level of coordination with our partners, and a continued commitment to follow every terrorism lead to its conclusion. I commend all who contributed to this investigation for their efforts.”

“Today’s indictment demonstrates what can be achieved when law enforcement

agencies combine their unique legal authorities into a unified campaign against terrorism. ICE and the Department of Homeland Security are proud to have contributed their immigration expertise and resources to this Joint Terrorism Task Force investigation,” said Assistant Secretary Garcia.

The previous indictments charging Hassoun allege that he lied to Department of Homeland Security and FBI agents investigating his activities in recruiting and fundraising for violent jihad activities, and that he also made false statements to the immigration judge who was conducting Hassoun’s immigration proceedings. The indictment alleges, for example, that Hassoun perjured himself concerning the foreign travel of an unindicted co-conspirator for the purpose of fighting in a violent jihad, and that he lied when he denied speaking in coded language while discussing jihad activities. The firearm charge alleges that Hassoun, a non-immigrant alien, was illegally in possession of a Smith & Wesson 9 millimeter pistol on or about June 12, 2002.

If convicted, Hassoun and Youssef face maximum statutory penalties of 15 years in prison on the conspiracy to provide material support charge, and 15 years on the material support charge. Hassoun also faces a statutory maximum sentence of 10 years in prison on the firearm charge and five years on each of the false statement, perjury and obstruction of justice charges.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives conducted this investigation. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Russell R. Killinger and Trial Attorney Stephanie K. Pell of the Counterterrorism Section at the U.S. Department of Justice.

Criminal indictments are only charges and not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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