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SAMI AL-ARIAN PLEADS GUILTY TO CONSPIRACY TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO PALESTINIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD

Faces Deportation After Serving Prison Sentence

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Former University of South Florida professor Sami Al-Arian has pleaded guilty to a charge of conspiring to provide services to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), a specially designated terrorist, in violation of U.S. law, the Department of Justice announced today.

In a closed proceeding before a federal magistrate at U.S. District Court in the Middle District of Florida last week, Al-Arian pleaded guilty to Count Four of the indictment against him – a charge of conspiracy to make or receive contributions of funds, goods or services to or for the benefit of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The plea hearing was closed over the objections of the government and unsealed today. The guilty plea was accepted by U.S. District Court Judge James S. Moody, Jr. this afternoon. Sentencing was scheduled for May 1, 2006.

Al-Arian's agreement with the government calls for a recommended prison sentence of 46 to 57 months in prison, based on a five-year maximum statutory sentence. Al-Arian, 48, who has been in custody since his arrest on Feb. 20, 2003, has agreed to stipulate to deportation to another country by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement once his prison sentence has ended. Al-Arian has lived in this country for approximately 30 years.

"We have a responsibility not to allow our Nation to be a safe haven for those who provide assistance to the activity of terrorists," said Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales. "Sami Al-Arian has already spent significant time behind bars and will now lose the right to live in the country he calls home as a result of his confessed criminal conduct on behalf of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which is the same conduct he steadfastly denied in public statements over the last decade."

"The United States stands committed to bringing terrorists and their supporters to justice," said Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division. "Al-Arian has now admitted providing assistance to help the Palestinian Islamic Jihad – a specially designated terrorist organization with deadly goals – as the government has alleged from the start."

"This conviction is the result of years of exhaustive investigative and prosecutorial work, during which the government utilized the many tools we have available to us in the ongoing war against terrorism," said U.S. Attorney Paul I. Perez of the Middle District of Florida. "Because of the painstaking work of the prosecutors and agents who pursued this case, Al-Arian has now confessed to helping terrorists do their work from his base here in the United States – a base he is no longer able to maintain."

In the plea agreement, Al-Arian admits that he was associated with several organizations, including the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, in the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s. He also admits that co-defendants Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, Bashir Musa Mohammed Nafi and Mazen Al-Najjar were associated with PIJ. President Clinton issued an executive order in January 1995 which banned certain transactions with organizations and individuals who were “specially designated terrorists,” including PIJ, Sheik Abd Al Aziz Awda and Fathi Shiqaqi and later, Ramadan Shallah.

Al-Arian admits that he performed services for the PIJ in 1995 and thereafter, when he was a professor at the University of South Florida and after he knew that the PIJ had been designated by President Clinton as a terrorist organization. Al-Arian also acknowledges in the plea agreement that he knew the PIJ used acts of violence as a means to achieve its objectives. Nevertheless, Al-Arian continued to assist the terrorist organization, for instance, by filing official paperwork to obtain immigration benefits for PIJ associate Bashir Nafi, and concealing the terrorist associations of various individuals associated with the PIJ. He further admits to assisting PIJ associate Mazen al-Najjar in a federal court proceeding, a proceeding in which al-Najjar and Nafi both falsely claimed under oath that they were not associated with the PIJ. Moreover, Al-Arian acknowledges that in late 1995, when Ramadan Shallah, co-conspirator and former director of Al-Arian’s “think tank,” the World and Islam Studies Enterprise (WISE) was named as the new Secretary General of the PIJ, Al-Arian falsely denied to the media that he knew of Shallah’s association with PIJ.

Al-Arian was arrested by the FBI on Feb. 20, 2003 following the return of an indictment by a federal grand jury in Tampa, charging him and several co-defendants. Al-Arian was acquitted of eight of the 18 counts against him following a six-month trial on Dec. 6, 2005, but the jury deadlocked on three of the four most serious conspiracy charges against him, including the charge of conspiracy to provide services to the PIJ.

This case was prosecuted by Executive Assistant U.S. Attorney Terry Zitek and Assistant U.S. Attorney Walter Furr of the U.S. Attorney’s Office in the Middle District of Florida, and Trial Attorneys Cherie Krigsman and Alexis Collins of the Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division. The investigation was conducted by a Task Force led by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with assistance from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Internal Revenue Service and state and local law enforcement officials, among others.

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