

NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

BETH PHILLIPS

Contact Don Ledford, Public Affairs • (816) 426-4220 • 400 East Ninth Street, Room 5510 • Kansas City, MO 64106
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow/index.html

JULY 7, 2010
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FORMER CONGRESSMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO OBSTRUCTING JUSTICE, ACTING AS UNREGISTERED FOREIGN AGENT

IARA FUNDRAISER ALSO PLEADS GUILTY TO CONSPIRING WITH FORMER CONGRESSMAN, OTHERS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Beth Phillips, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a former congressman and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations pleaded guilty in federal court today to obstruction of justice and to acting as an unregistered foreign agent, related to his work for an Islamic charity with ties to international terrorism.

Mark Deli Siljander, 59, of Great Falls, Va., pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Nanette K. Laughrey to one charge contained in an Oct. 21, 2008, federal indictment, and an additional charge filed today, involving his work for the Islamic American Relief Agency (IARA) of Columbia, Mo. **Siljander** was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Michigan and was a U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations General Assembly.

Co-defendant **Abdel Azim El-Siddig**, of Chicago, Ill., a former IARA fundraiser, also pleaded guilty today to conspiring with **Siljander** and others to hire **Siljander** to lobby for IARA's removal from a Senate Finance Committee list of charities suspected of having terrorist ties, while concealing this advocacy and not registering with the proper authorities.

“A former congressman engaged in illegal lobbying for a charity suspected of funding international terrorism. He then used his own charities to hide the payments for his criminal activities,” Phillips said. “**Siljander** repeatedly lied to FBI agents and prosecutors investigating serious crimes related to national security. With today's guilty pleas, all of the defendants in this case have admitted their guilt and will be held accountable for their actions.”

Siljander operated a Washington, D.C. consulting business called Global Strategies, Inc. IARA was an Islamic charity in Columbia, Mo., that served as the U.S. office of an international organization headquartered in Khartoum, Sudan. IARA was closed in October 2004, after being identified by the U.S. Treasury Department as a specially designated global terrorist organization, for the support its international offices provided to Osama bin Laden, al-Qaida, and the Taliban. The executive director of IARA, co-defendant **Mubarak Hamed**, 53, of Columbia, a naturalized United States citizen originally from Sudan, has pleaded guilty in connection with this case.

According to today's plea agreements, between March and May 2004, **Hamed** and **El-Siddig** hired **Siljander** to lobby for IARA's removal from a U.S. Senate Finance Committee list of charities suspected of funding international terrorism, and its reinstatement as an approved government contractor. IARA lost its status as an approved government contractor in 1999, when the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) terminated grants for two relief projects in Mali, Africa. USAID informed the organization that the grants were not in the national security interest of the United States.

Siljander, **El-Siddig** and **Hamed** each knew that IARA was part of a large international organization controlled by its headquarters in Khartoum, Sudan, and agreed with each other to conceal **Siljander's** efforts on IARA's behalf. In order to do so, **Siljander** instructed **El-Siddig** and **Hamed** to transfer \$75,000 of IARA's funds to him by funneling them through nonprofit entities. **El-Siddig** carried at least three checks issued to **Siljander's** charities from Chicago to Washington, D.C., and gave them to **Siljander**.

In exchange for the payments, during the Summer of 2004, **Siljander** acted as an agent for IARA by contacting persons at the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, USAID, the Department of Justice, and the Department of the Army, in an effort to have IARA removed from the USAID list of debarred entities, and to remove IARA from the Senate Finance Committee's list of charities suspected of funding terrorism. Federal law requires anyone who serves as an agent of a foreign entity, including an organization, to register with the U.S. Attorney General.

In pleading guilty, **Siljander** admitted that in two separate interviews he repeatedly lied to FBI agents and prosecutors acting on behalf of a federal grand jury. **Siljander** obstructed justice by falsely denying that he was hired to advocate for IARA, and by falsely claiming that the payments from IARA were charitable donations intended to assist him in writing a book about bridging the gap between Islam and Christianity.

Under federal statutes, **Siljander** is subject to a sentence of up to 15 years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine of up to \$500,000. **El-Siddig** is subject to a sentence of up to five years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine of up to \$250,000. Sentencing hearings will be scheduled after the completion of presentence investigations by the U.S. Probation Office.

Siljander and **El-Siddig** were the final defendants facing trial next week in Kansas City, Mo.

Co-defendant **Hamed** pleaded guilty on June 25, 2010, to conspiring to illegally transfer more than \$1 million to Iraq in violation of federal sanctions, and to obstructing the administration of the laws governing tax-exempt charities. **Hamed** used IARA to solicit charitable contributions throughout the United States, taking in between \$1 million and \$3 million in contributions annually from 1991 to 2003, and then illegally transferred funds to Iraq, with the assistance of a Jordanian identified by the U.S. Treasury Department as a specially designated global terrorist. **Hamed** also impaired and impeded the administration of the Internal Revenue laws by misusing IARA's tax-exempt status, providing false information to the IRS, and lying to federal agents.

Co-defendant **Ali Mohamed Bagegni**, 56, a native of Libya who is a naturalized U.S. citizen and former resident of Columbia, pleaded guilty on April 6, 2010, to his role in the conspiracy. **Bagegni** was a member of the board of directors of IARA.

Co-defendant **Ahmad Mustafa**, 57, of Columbia, a citizen of Iraq and a lawful permanent resident alien, pleaded guilty on Dec. 17, 2009, to illegally transferring funds to Iraq in violation of federal sanctions. **Mustafa** worked as a fund-raiser for IARA and traveled throughout the United States soliciting charitable contributions. Further, in 1999, 2000 and 2001, at **Hamed's** behest, **Mustafa** traveled to Iraq on **IARA** business. In 2001, he visited Iraq for several weeks and met with numerous officials to discuss the process of opening an IARA office in Iraq. Among the officials with whom **Mustafa** met was Hushyar Zibari, who was at the time a leader in the Patriotic Democratic Party of Kurdistan and is currently the foreign minister of Iraq. **Mustafa** also looked to find a building suitable for an **IARA** office in the Kurdish provinces of Iraq.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Anthony P. Gonzalez, Steven M. Mohlhenrich, Dan Stewart and Brian Casey from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Missouri, and Trial Attorney Paul G. Casey from the National Security Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, IRS-Criminal Investigation and U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of the Inspector General.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow/index.html>

<http://www.justice.gov/usao/mow/news2010/siljander.ple.htm>