

U.S. Department of Justice

July 28, 2015

PRESS RELEASE:

Monroe County Resident Charged With Attempting To Use Weapon Of Mass Destruction

A Monroe County resident was charged with attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction, an explosive device.

Wifredo A. Ferrer, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, John P. Carlin, Assistant Attorney General for National Security, George L. Piro, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Miami Field Office, and members of the South Florida Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), made the announcement.

Harlem Suarez, a/k/a “Almlak Benitez,” 23, of Key West, Florida, was charged by a criminal complaint with knowingly attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction against a person or property within the United States, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 2332a(a)(2), punishable by up to life in prison.

According to the allegations contained in the complaint, in April 2015, Suarez came to the attention of the FBI due to Facebook postings which contained extremist rhetoric and promoted the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a designated foreign terrorist organization (FTO).

The complaint further alleges that Suarez told an FBI confidential human source (CHS) that he wanted to make a “timer bomb.” Suarez purchased components for this device, which was to contain galvanized nails, be concealed in a backpack, and be remotely detonated by a cellular telephone. Suarez intended to bury the device at a public beach in Key West and then detonate it.

On July 27, 2015, Suarez took possession of an inert explosive device and was arrested.

“The top priority of the Department of Justice is to protect the security of the American people. The U.S. Attorney’s Office, in collaboration with the FBI, works tirelessly to advance this mission by continuing to thwart home-grown acts of terrorism,” stated U.S. Attorney Ferrer.

“According to the complaint, Harlem Suarez, a self-professed ISIL adherent, knowingly attempted to use a weapon of mass destruction - a backpack bomb - in the United States,” said Assistant Attorney General Carlin. “Stopping attacks on our homeland by those inspired or directed by designated foreign terrorist organizations is the highest priority of the National Security Division.”

“There is no room for failure when it comes to investigating the potential use of a weapon of mass destruction,” said George L. Piro, Special Agent in Charge, FBI Miami. “The FBI and our local, state and federal partners work around the clock to prevent such catastrophic weapons from being used against our citizens. Even so, we ask the public to be vigilant and report suspicious activity to law enforcement.”

Mr. Ferrer commended the investigative efforts of the FBI, JTTF, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations (ICE-HSI), Key West Police Department, Monroe County Sheriff’s Office, and Palm Beach County Sheriff’s Office. This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Marc S. Anton and Karen E. Gilbert and Trial Attorneys Clement McGovern and Michael Dittoe of the Counterterrorism Section of the U.S. Department of Justice.

A complaint is only an accusation and a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.