

Mohamad Youssef Hammoud sentenced to 30 years in terrorism financing case

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. - Mohamad Youssef Hammoud, 37, was resentenced Thursday to 30 years in prison on charges related to his activities of providing material support to the foreign terrorist organization, Hezbollah, from about 1995 to July 2000 in Charlotte, following a multi-agency investigation involving special agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

Hammoud, who has remained in federal custody since his arrest on July 21, 2000, was born in Lebanon, came into the United States illegally in 1992 and lived here by virtue of three sham marriages to U.S. citizens until his arrest.

Hammoud, along with two of his brothers and 22 others, were indicted in 2000 in U.S. District Court in the Western District of North Carolina on numerous criminal counts which included the charge of providing material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization, Hezbollah.

From April to June 2002, Hammoud and one of his brothers, Chawki Hammoud, were tried before a federal jury in Charlotte on those charges. At trial, both were convicted of providing material support to Hezbollah, and on numerous other criminal counts, including conspiracy, cigarette smuggling, money laundering, racketeering, and immigration fraud.

The guilty verdicts were delivered by the jury at the end of the five-week trial on June 21, 2002, after three days of deliberation.

On Feb. 28, 2003 Trial Judge Graham C. Mullen sentenced Mohamad Hammoud to 155 years in prison. He later entered a notice of appeal, and through a three-year appeal process which ultimately carried the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld all of his convictions but vacated Mullen's original sentence. The appeals court remanded the case back to the U.S. District Court for the Western District of North Carolina for reconsideration of the original sentence. Thursday's resentencing hearing was held in order to give Mohamad Hammoud and the government the opportunity to argue a variance in U.S. sentencing guidelines.

U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina Anne M. Tompkins said, "Mohamad Hammoud was a student and member of Hezbollah as a youth in his home country and came to the United States on a Hezbollah-driven mission. He loyally accomplished his mission by creating a criminal enterprise which accumulated millions of dollars in profits, purchased businesses in the U.S., preached radical Muslim fundamentalism as he led a clandestine terrorist cell in Charlotte, raised funds for the cause, and saw that the funds were delivered to Hezbollah leadership in Lebanon. His guilty verdicts rendered by the jury were upheld by the Supreme Court of the United States. During his time of imprisonment while he was awaiting trial, he ordered the murder of the then prosecuting attorney and the bombing of

Charlotte's federal courthouse. He continues to this day to pose no less a threat to our country and our citizens. Today's sentence is fair. It is a significant sentence for a convicted terrorist. We thank the law enforcement, prosecutors, jury, and the courts for their work involved in the case along the way. Clearly, the American justice system has once again fairly and justly dealt with a person who is a proven threat to the very fabric of our society."

This resentencing hearing, the trial of the case in 2002 and the full appeals process represent the successful prosecution of 18 defendants for their involvement in the operation of a Hezbollah terrorist fund-raising cell in Charlotte. According to the court record, Mohamad Hammoud led a cigarette smuggling organization which was responsible for the illegal smuggling of over \$8 million worth of cigarettes from North Carolina to Michigan during the late 1990s. Testimony and trial evidence showed that some of the profits from the cigarette sales were sent to Hezbollah in Lebanon by Hammoud. The 2002 trial was the first in the country of a federal "material support to a designated terrorist organization" charge. The investigation and prosecution involved law enforcement cooperation at every level: state, federal, and international, involving the substantial assistance of Canadian intelligence officials.

First Assistant U.S. Attorney David A. Brown, who argued the case before Judge Mullen Thursday, said, "Mohamad Hammoud stands today as an enemy combatant who continues to be successfully removed from the front lines. Today's sentence is fair because Hammoud's proven acts call for this sentence. He earned this sentence. More importantly, it is fair because the American people deserve to be free of fear of any retaliatory efforts by Hammoud. The collective experiences of the American people since September 11, 2001 stand as constant reminders that leaders and groups such as Hammoud and his local terrorist cell, still represent the greatest threat to American citizens."

In addition to ICE HSI, this case was investigated by agents and officers of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Criminal Investigations, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, and the Iredell County Sheriff's Office in North Carolina. These law enforcement agencies received substantial assistance from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The original prosecution team included former Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kenneth D. Bell and D. Scott Broyles, along with former Trial Attorney Martha Rubio of what was then known as the Justice Department's Terrorism and Violent Crime Section. The resentencing hearing was handled by First Assistant U.S. Attorney David A. Brown and Assistant U.S. Attorney Craig D. Randall.