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Foreign national extradited and pleads guilty to human smuggling conspiracy

WASHINGTON – A Pakistani citizen pleaded guilty today for his role in a scheme to smuggle undocumented migrants from Pakistan into the United States.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Blanco of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Channing D. Phillips of the District of Columbia and Special Agent in Charge Angel M. Melendez of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in New York made the announcement.

Sharafat Ali Khan, 32, a Pakistani citizen and former resident of Brazil, pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to smuggle undocumented migrants into the United States for profit before U.S. District Judge Reggie B. Walton of the District of Columbia. Kahn was extradited to the United States from Qatar on July 13, 2016. Judge Walton scheduled Khan's sentencing hearing for July 6, 2017.

According to admissions in the plea agreement, between March 2014 and May 2016, Khan and other co-conspirators organized and arranged the unlawful smuggling of large numbers of undocumented migrants to the United States. For their smuggling operation, Khan admitted that he and his co-conspirators used a network of facilitators to transport undocumented migrants from Pakistan and elsewhere through Brazil and Central America and then into the United States by land, air or sea travel. Khan further admitted that he was responsible for managing safe houses for the migrants and arranging a network of associates in other countries to serve as escorts during different legs of the smuggling route. Khan also admitted that voyage included harsh conditions that caused a substantial risk of serious bodily injury or death – including lengthy foot hikes with little food and water through the Darien Gap, a dangerous tropical forest area in Panama.

The investigation was conducted under the Extraterritorial Criminal Travel Strike Force (ECT) program, a joint partnership between the Justice Department's Criminal Division and HSI. The ECT program focuses on human smuggling networks that may present particular national security or public safety risks, or present grave humanitarian concerns. ECT has dedicated investigative, intelligence and prosecutorial resources. ECT coordinates and receives assistance from other U.S. government agencies and foreign law enforcement authorities.

HSI New York investigated this case, with assistance from HSI Brazil, Mexico, Panama and Washington, D.C. field offices, the South Florida Joint Terrorism Task Force, FBI-Miami, the Human Smuggling Cell, the U.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) in Brazil, the Brazilian Federal Police and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center. The Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs provided significant support with the defendant's extradition and foreign legal assistance requests. The Justice Department thanks the Government of Qatar for their assistance with the extradition in this case. Senior Trial Attorney Michael Sheckels of the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard DiZinno of the District of Columbia are prosecuting the case.