



Prepared Remarks of Attorney General John Ashcroft
(NOTE: The Attorney General Often Deviates from Prepared Remarks)
Islamic Group Indictment/SAMs
April 9, 2002

This afternoon, I am announcing the indictment of four associates of Sheikh Abdel Rahman, a leader of the designated terrorist organization the Islamic Group. Since 1995, Sheikh Rahman has been serving life in prison for conspiring to wage a war of terrorism against the United States, including the plot that resulted in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center and a conspiracy to destroy several New York landmarks, including the United Nations. Today's indictment charges four individuals - including Rahman's lawyer, a United States citizen - with aiding Sheikh Abdel Rahman in continuing to direct the terrorist activities of the Islamic Group from his prison cell in the United States.

The United States charges the following individuals:

- Lynne Stewart, who was Sheikh Abdel Rahman's attorney during his 1995 conviction for the World Trade Center bombing and has continued to act as one of his attorneys since he has been in prison;
- Mohammed Yousry, the Arabic language interpreter for communications between Stewart and the imprisoned Sheikh Rahman;
- Ahmed Abdel Sattar, a resident of Staten Island, New York and an active Islamic Group leader, whom the indictment describes as a "surrogate" for Rahman; and
- Yassir Al-Sirri, the former head of the London-based Islamic Observation Center, currently in custody in the United Kingdom, who is charged with facilitating communications among Islamic Group members and providing financing for their activities.

The indictment charges that these defendants worked in concert with Sheikh Abdel Rahman - in violation of Special Administrative Measures restricting Rahman's communications with the outside world - to provide material support and resources to the Islamic Group. The indictment charges that Rahman used communications with Stewart, translated by Yousry, to pass messages to and receive messages from Sattar, Al-Sirri and other Islamic Group members.

The terrorist movement at the center of the facts alleged in this indictment, the Islamic Group, has as its credo a message of hate that is now tragically familiar to Americans: to oppose by whatever means necessary the nations, governments, and individuals who do not share its radical interpretation of Islamic law. The Islamic Group is a global terrorist organization that has forged alliances with other terrorist groups, including al Qaeda. It has an active membership in the United States, concentrated in the New York City



metropolitan area.

Since at least the early 1990s, Sheikh Abdel Rahman has been one of the principal leaders of the Islamic Group, and has directed its terrorist operations, defined its goals, and recruited its membership in the United States. In 1997, following his 1995 imprisonment, Special Administrative Measures were imposed on Sheikh Abdel Rahman. Among other restrictions, these measures prohibited Rahman, quote, "from passing or receiving any written or recorded communications to or from other inmates, visitors, attorney(s), prison staff or anyone else." In 1999, these restrictions were amended to prohibit Rahman from communicating with any member of the news media in person or through his attorneys. Before being allowed access to Rahman, his attorneys, including Lynne Stewart, were required to sign and did sign an affirmation acknowledging that they would abide by these measures and would be accompanied by translators only to communicate with Sheikh Rahman regarding legal matters.

Today's indictment charges that Lynne Stewart and Mohammed Yousry repeatedly and willfully violated these orders in order to maintain Sheikh Abdel Rahman's influence over the terrorist activities of the Islamic Group. Among other overt acts, the indictment charges that during a May 2000 visit to Sheikh Abdel Rahman, Stewart allowed Yousry to read letters from Ahmed Abdel Sattar regarding whether the Islamic Group should continue to comply with a cease-fire in terrorist activities against Egyptian authorities that had been in place following the shooting and stabbing of 58 tourists and four Egyptians visiting an archeological site in Luxor, Egypt in 1997 - a terrorist attack for which the Islamic Group claimed credit. The indictment charges that, because these communications violated the Special Administrative Measures placed on Sheikh Rahman, Stewart took affirmative steps to conceal the conversation from prison guards, making extraneous comments in English to mask the Arabic conversation between Rahman and Yousry. Following the meeting, and in further violation of the Special Administrative Measures to which she had agreed, Stewart is charged with announcing to the news media that Rahman had withdrawn his support for the cease-fire.

The indictment further alleges that in a January 2001 phone call, Ahmed Abdel Sattar informed Stewart that prison administrators had pleaded with Rahman's wife to tell Rahman to take his medicine. The indictment charges that although they knew Rahman was voluntarily refusing to take insulin for his diabetes, Sattar and Stewart agreed to issue a public statement falsely claiming that Rahman was being denied medical treatment. The indictment charges that Stewart stated that this misrepresentation was "safe" because no one on the "outside" would know the truth.

Shortly after terrorists attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, the Department of Justice promulgated a rule creating the authority to monitor the attorney-client communications of federal inmates whom we suspected of facilitating acts of terrorism. At the time, we attempted to make clear that of the 158,000 inmates in the federal system, this authority would apply only to the 16 inmates who, like Sheikh Abdel Rahman, were already under Special Administrative Measures. The authority was carefully circumscribed to preserve inmates' rights while preventing acts of terrorism. Each prisoner would be told in advance his conversations would be monitored. None of the information that is protected by attorney-client privilege would be used for prosecution. Information would only be used to stop impending terrorist acts and save American lives.

The Department of Justice announced this authority back in October with the knowledge - which could not be publically shared for fear of exposing Americans to greater risk - that inmates such as Sheikh Abdel Rahman were attempting to



subvert our system of justice for terrorist ends. In fact, the training manual for al Qaeda terrorists offers detailed instructions to recruits on how to continue their terrorist operations in the event they get caught. Imprisoned terrorists are instructed to take advantage of any contact with the outside world to, quote, "communicate with brothers outside prison and exchange information that may be helpful to them in their work. The importance of mastering the art of hiding messages is self-evident here."

As today's indictment sets forth, Sheikh Abdel Rahman has learned al Qaeda's lessons well. Sheikh Rahman is determined to exploit the rights guaranteed him under the United States system of justice to pursue the destruction of that very system. The United States cannot and will not stand by and allow this to happen. Accordingly, today I am announcing that the Department of Justice is invoking for the first time the authority to monitor the communications between Sheikh Abdel Rahman and his attorneys under the new regulations.

Since our country was attacked over six months ago, I have sought to reassure the American people that the actions of the Department of Justice are carefully designed to target terrorists and to protect American rights and freedoms.

Today's actions pursue the same objectives with the same protections in mind. We will not look the other way when our institutions of justice are subverted. We will not ignore those who claim rights for themselves while they seek their destruction for others.

We will, in the President's words, defend freedom -- and justice -- no matter what the cost.

Thank you, now I will be happy to take your questions.

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