



***United States Attorney
District of New Jersey***

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**TWO NEW JERSEY MEN PLEAD GUILTY TO CONSPIRING TO KILL OVERSEAS
FOR DESIGNATED FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION AL SHABAAB**

NEWARK, N.J. – Two New Jersey men arrested at JFK International Airport last summer pleaded guilty today to conspiring to murder individuals overseas on behalf of a foreign terrorist group operating in Somalia, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Mohamed Hamoud Alessa, 21, of North Bergen, and Carlos Eduardo Almonte, a/k/a “Omar,” 24, of Elmwood Park, each pleaded guilty to one count of conspiring to murder persons outside the United States on behalf of designated Foreign Terrorist Organization Al Shabaab. The defendants entered their guilty pleas before U.S. District Judge Dickinson R. Debevoise in Newark federal court.

On June 5, 2010, Alessa and Almonte were taken into custody by pre-staged arrest teams as they attempted to board separate international flights at JFK International Airport. They have been held in continuous custody since their arrest by order of U.S. Magistrate Judge Madeline Cox Arleo.

U.S. Attorney Fishman stated: “Through covert recordings and their admissions today, Alessa’s and Almonte’s own words confirm they took steps down a deadly path. The defendants planned and trained for a mission that began in their New Jersey neighborhoods and would end with the murder of innocent civilians. Cases like this underscore the importance of successful law enforcement cooperation and continued vigilance.”

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

It was Alessa and Almonte’s aim to travel to a place outside of the United States and murder individuals whose beliefs and practices did not align with their extremist ideology. The defendants admitted that they planned to join Al Shabaab, an international terrorist group based in Somalia, knowing the group was engaged in carrying out violent attacks against individuals in that country, including members of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia and African Union soldiers. As part of this campaign, Al Shabaab has conducted military assaults, bombings, and other violent acts, and has attempted through its media operations to recruit foreigners – including Americans and other Westerners – to join its ranks.

In October 2006, the FBI received a tip concerning the defendants’ activities. As the investigation continued, an NYPD Intelligence Division undercover officer recorded numerous meetings and conversations with them, during which the defendants discussed and prepared to

carry out their plan.

The defendants admitted that those preparations included: saving and pooling thousands of dollars; physically conditioning themselves by, among other things, lifting weights and running; engaging in combat simulations using paintball guns, computer software, and other items; acquiring tactical clothing, hydration systems, knives, night-vision optics, and other equipment; and purchasing airline tickets to Egypt with the intent to then travel to Somalia. They also admitted that as part of their plan, Alessa and Almonte had traveled to Jordan in February 2007 and while there, inquired about opportunities to meet with groups committed to establishing Islamic law through violence.

Additionally, Alessa and Almonte admitted that they acquired, viewed, and displayed for others audio, video, and written materials – produced by and relating to Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab, and other extremist groups – which advocated, depicted, and/or sought to justify the killing of individuals who opposed them, including civilians.

The charge to which Alessa and Almonte pleaded guilty carries a statutory maximum sentence of life in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Under the terms of their plea agreements, the defendants agreed not to request a sentence of less than 15 years in prison, while the government agreed not to request a sentence of more than 30 years. The defendants are scheduled to be sentenced on June 20, 2011.

U.S. Attorney Fishman praised the outstanding work of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Michael B. Ward; the Newark Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF); the New York City Police Department, under the direction of Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly; and the State of New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, under Director Charles B. McKenna, in conducting the investigation leading to today's guilty pleas. The JTTF is made up of agents and officers of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations; the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection; the U.S. Department of State; the New Jersey State Police; the Jersey City Police Department; the Bayonne Police Department; the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Police Department; and other law enforcement agencies.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Andrew Kogan and L. Judson Welle of the United States Attorney's Office National Security Unit, and Alamdar S. Hamdani, Trial Attorney, Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department's National Security Division.

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Defense counsel:

Alessa: Stanley L. Cohen, Esq., New York

Almonte: James Patton, Esq., Livingston, N.J.