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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, July 18, 2011
WWW.JUSTICE.GOV/USAO/MN

Minneapolis man pleads guilty to Terrorism Offense

MINNEAPOLIS – Earlier today in federal court, a 26-year-old Minneapolis man pleaded guilty to conspiring to provide material support to a conspiracy to murder, kidnap and maim abroad. Omer Abdi Mohamed, also known as “Brother Omer” and “Galeyr,” who was indicted on November 17, 2009, entered his plea before United States District Court Chief Judge Michael J. Davis.

In his plea agreement, Mohamed admitted being a member of a conspiracy that recruited young men of Somali descent to travel to Somalia to fight against Ethiopian troops, who were in Somalia assisting the internationally-recognized Transitional Federal Government (“TFG”) of Somalia. Mohamed admitted assisting the men in planning their trips, knowing that once in Somalia, the men intended to murder, kidnap, or maim Ethiopian and Somali government troops.

Following the entry of the plea, United States Attorney B. Todd Jones said, “Those involved in this conspiracy, including Omer Abdi Mohamed, violated the law in a dangerous and misguided effort to support a terrorist organization. In the process, they tore apart many Somali-American families. Parents were left to fret over the disappearance of their young sons, who often left home without a word. In some instances family members discovered what happened to their relatives only by watching Internet videos being used as propaganda by al-Shabaab. I doubt many of us can imagine the feelings in such circumstances, and I can only hope that the criminal prosecutions we continue to take against those involved, including Omer Abdi Mohamed, will help deter these ill-advised actions in the future.”

Between September and December of 2007, Mohamed admittedly attended meetings at a Minneapolis mosque, restaurant, and private residence, where he and his co-conspirators formed a secret plan that called for Somali men residing in Minneapolis to travel to Somalia to fight. He also facilitated the travel of several of these young men, including assisting them in obtaining

plane tickets as well as the false itinerary needed by one man to mislead his family about the purpose of his travel.

In his plea agreement, Mohamed further admitted being present in Minneapolis when money was raised to mobilize groups of men to travel to Somalia. Many of the donations came from unsuspecting members of the Somali-American community, who were told the money was going to be used for Somalia relief efforts.

The indictment of Mohamed arose out of the “Operation Rhino” investigation, which has focused on young ethnic Somali men from the Minneapolis area who were recruited to fight with al-Shabaab against the TFG and African Union peacekeeping troops in Somalia. The earliest groups of identified travelers departed the United States in October and December 2007, while others left in February 2008, August 2008, November 2008, and October 2009. Upon arriving in Somalia, the men resided in al-Shabaab safe-houses in Southern Somalia until constructing an al-Shabaab training camp, where they were trained. Senior members of al-Shabaab and a senior member of al-Qaeda in East Africa conducted the training.

In July 2008, men from Minneapolis as well as other Americans participated in an al-Shabaab ambush of Ethiopian troops. Then, on October 29, 2008, one of the December 2007 travelers from Minneapolis, Shirwa Ahmed, detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device as part of an apparently coordinated series of five suicide bombings in Bosaso and Hargeisa, Somalia. In doing so, Ahmed is believed to have become the first American suicide bomber in Somalia. Then, in June 2011, Farah Mohamed Beledi, one of the indicted October 2009 travelers, was killed at a checkpoint in Somalia as he attempted to detonate his suicide vest.

This is the sixth guilty plea in connection with the investigation. Kamal Said Hassan, Abdifatah Yusuf Isse, and Salah Osman Ahmed returned from Somalia to the United States and have been convicted of terrorism offenses. Adarus Abdulle Ali and Abdow Munye Abdow have been convicted of obstruction offenses. Mohamud Said Omar is in the custody of authorities in the Netherlands pending extradition, and Ahmed Hussein Mahamud is in custody in the United States pending trial. An indictment of eight men believed to be fugitives in Somalia also was unsealed late last year.

For his crime, Omer Abdi Mohamed faces a potential maximum penalty of 15 years in prison and a lifetime of supervised release. Chief Judge Davis will determine his sentence at a future hearing, yet to be scheduled. This case is the result of an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Joint Terrorism Task Force, and it is being prosecuted by United States Attorney B. Todd Jones, Assistant U.S. Attorney Charles J. Kovats, and Trial Attorney William M. Narus of the United States Department of Justice National Security Division.

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