

Leader of Revolution Muslim Pleads Guilty to Using Internet to Solicit Murder and Encourage Violent Extremism

U.S. Attorney's Office February 09, 2012

Eastern District of Virginia (703) 299-3700

ALEXANDRIA, VA—Jesse Curtis Morton, aka Younus Abdullah Muhammed, 33, of New York City, pleaded guilty today to using his position as a leader of Revolution Muslim Organization's Internet sites to conspire to solicit murder, make threatening communications, and use the Internet to place others in fear.

Neil H. MacBride, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; James W. McJunkin, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Washington Field Office; and Raymond W. Kelly, New York City Police Commissioner, made the announcement after the plea was accepted by U.S. District Judge Liam O'Grady.

Morton faces a maximum penalty five years in prison for each of the three charges when he is sentenced on May 18, 2012.

"Jesse Morton operated Revolution Muslim to radicalize those who saw and heard his materials online and to incite them to engage in violence against those they believed to be enemies of Islam," said U.S. Attorney MacBride. "We may never know all of those who were inspired to engage in terrorism because of Revolution Muslim, but the string of recent terrorism cases with ties to Morton's organization demonstrates the threat it posed to our national security. We're grateful to the FBI, NYPD, and their law enforcement partners throughout the world who made today's conviction possible."

"Individuals such as Morton who encourage violence and create fear over the Internet are a danger to our society and to the freedoms we enjoy as citizens," said Assistant Director in Charge McJunkin. "Today's plea, and other recent cases of those associated with Morton's organization, demonstrate the widespread nature of this danger. Together with our partner law enforcement agencies, and with the assistance of the community, the FBI will continue to pursue those who promulgate violent extremism and promote the radicalization of others."

"Fortunately, NYPD Intelligence Division detectives were in a position to learn exactly how Morton used the Internet to conspire to solicit murder, and how he encouraged others to solicit the murder of an artist whose material he deemed offensive," said Police Commissioner Kelly. "This important plea resulted because the NYPD's monitoring of Morton's activities, combined with the investigative and prosecutorial expertise of the FBI and the U.S. Attorney for Eastern District of Virginia, made for a strong case, in addition to a strong partnership."

According to a statement of facts filed with his plea agreement, Morton founded Revolution Muslim in December 2007 and created various online forums that contained postings and information supportive of violent extremism. Morton and his associates used the organization's websites to encourage Muslims to engage in violence against those they believed to be enemies of Islam and to support Osama bin Laden, Anwar Al-Awlaki, al Qaeda, the Taliban, and others espousing violence. They posted messages in support of the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, the November 2009 killings at Ft. Hood and attacks and future threats against Jewish organizations, among others.

Through his online forums, Morton conspired with Zachary Chesser, of Fairfax County, Va., and others to solicit the murder of an artist tied to the "Everybody Draw Mohammed Day" movement in May 2010, including posting online a magazine that included the artist in a hit list for violent extremists to take out and a message from Anwar Al-Awlaki that explicitly called for the artist's assassination. In justifying these actions, Morton posted online a speech of his asserting that "Islam's position is that those that insult the Prophet may be killed" and exhorting his listeners to fight the "disbelievers near you."

In addition, Morton admitted through his statement of facts that he aided Chesser in taking repeated steps in April 2010 to encourage violent extremists to attack the writers of South Park for an episode that featured Muhammad in a bear suit, including highlighting their residence and urging online readers to "pay them a visit." Among the steps they took were posting on multiple occasions speeches by Anwar Al-Awlaki, which explained the Islamic justification for killing those who insult or defame Muhammad. Morton worked with Chesser to draft a message for the website regarding the South Park threats, including a quote from Osama bin Laden that "If there is no check in the freedom of your words, then let your hearts be open to the freedom of our actions." Morton and Chesser posted the final version of this statement on various extremist online forums, and Chesser told Morton that he expected the statement would "scare the kuffar." Kuffar is an Arabic term, referring to an unbeliever, or disbeliever, in Islam.

Chesser was arrested on July 21, 2010, charged with providing material support to al Shabaab and later also pleaded guilty to communicating threats and soliciting violent extremists to desensitize law enforcement. Four days after Chesser's arrest, Morton fled to Morocco, where he resided until his arrest on U.S. charges on May 26, 2011.

In his statement of facts, Morton admitted that the Revolution Muslim websites contained the writings of and/or contributed to the radicalization of individuals who were inclined to engage in violence, including the following:

Samir Khan, previously of Charlotte, N.C., before moving to Yemen in 2009, was authorized by Morton to post materials on Revolution Muslim, and Morton provided Khan with two articles for the first two online editions of Jihad Recollections, an online magazine dedicated to violent extremism. In July 2010, Morton posted the first edition of Inspire magazine, an English-language magazine supporting al Qaeda that Morton believed to be the product of Khan. The magazine included an eight-page article titled "Make a bomb in the kitchen of Your Mom," with detailed instructions regarding the construction of an explosive device.

Bilal Zaheer Ahmad, of the United Kingdom, was provided the password to Revolution Muslim by Morton and given permission to post messages. In November 2010, Ahmad praised Roshonara Choudhry for attempting to kill a British member of parliament over his support for the Iraq war and posted a list of 383 members of parliament who had voted for the Iraq war, along with suggestions on how to get in to see them and a link to a store selling a weapon similar to that used in Choudhry's attack. Ahmad told Morton that the purpose of the post was to "make those MPs fearful."

Abdel Hameed Shehedah, a former resident of Staten Island, N.Y., who was charged in October 2010 of making false statements involving his alleged attempt to travel to Pakistan to join a fighting group such as the Taliban. The statement of facts states that Shehedah attended Revolution Muslim meetings, made his website, civiljihad.com, a feeder site for Revolution Muslim and eventually arranged for all visitors to his website be routed automatically to Revolution Muslim.com.

Rezwan Ferdaus, of Ashland, Mass., was charged in September 2011 with plotting to attack the Pentagon and U.S. Capitol using large remote controlled aircraft filled with C-4 plastic explosives. The statement of facts states that in February 2010, Ferdaus e-mailed Morton asking for counsel regarding his duties as a Muslim and whether martyrdom operations were proper practice. Morton replied that martyrdom operations must be judged by intention but can have "enormous benefits (sic) in a war of attrition."

Colleen R. LaRose, aka "Jihad Jane," of Montgomery County, Pa., was charged in March 2010 with a variety of terrorism-related offenses, including plotting to kill Lars Vilks, a Swedish cartoonist who has been the subject of several murder threats based on his artwork depicting Muhammad. According to the statement of facts, Morton notified Sheikh Abdullah Faisal, a Muslim cleric convicted in the United Kingdom of soliciting murder, that LaRose was a subscriber to Revolution Muslim YouTube accounts.

Antonio Benjamin Martinez, of Baltimore, Md., was arrested and charged with plotting to bomb a military recruiting station in December 2010. The statement of facts states that one month prior to his arrest, Martinez viewed a video of Osama bin Laden and multiple terror training camp video clips on the Revolution Muslim website.

Jose Pimental, of New York City, was arrested and charged in November 2011 in connection with a plot to build and use a bomb to assassinate members of the U.S. military returning from active duty in Afghanistan. According to the statement of facts, Pimental contacted Morton saying that he was a big fan of Revolution Muslim, and that Morton recommended that Pimental stay away from an individual because "there is high probability that he is working for the FBI."

Mohamed Hamoud Alessa and Carlos Eduardo Almonte, both of New Jersey, were arrested in June 2010 on their way to Somalia to join a terrorist organization to kill individuals whose beliefs and practices did not accord with their ideology. The statement of facts states that both Alessa and Almonte were associates of Morton's within the Revolution Muslim organization, and Morton was interviewed by investigators from the New York City Police Department on the day of their arrest.

This investigation is being conducted by the FBI's Washington Field Office and the New York Police Department's Intelligence Division. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Gordon D. Kromberg and Karen L. Dunn of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia and Trial Attorney John T. Gibbs of the Counterterrorism Section in the National Security Division are prosecuting the case on behalf of the United States.

A copy of this press release may be found on the website of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia at www.usdoj.gov/usao/vae. Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia at www.vaed.uscourts.gov or on <http://pacer.uspci.uscourts.gov>.