



***United States Attorney
Southern District of New York***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
AUGUST 24, 2011**

**CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
ELLEN DAVIS,
JERIKA RICHARDSON,
CARLY SULLIVAN
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 637-2600**

**USPIS
THOMAS BOYLE
(212) 330-3049**

**MANHATTAN U.S. ATTORNEY CHARGES MARYLAND FOUNDER
OF "SAVE A TORAH" CHARITY WITH FRAUD**

*Defendant Allegedly Fabricated Stories Of "Rescuing" Torahs
Lost Or Hidden During The Holocaust To Steal
Hundreds Of Thousands Of Dollars*

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and RONALD J. VERROCHIO, the Inspector-in-Charge of the New York Office of the United States Postal Inspection Service ("USPIS"), announced today the arrest of MENACHEM YOULUS, a founder of the "Save a Torah" charity, which purported to "rescue" Torah scrolls lost or hidden during the Holocaust, for allegedly defrauding the charity and its donors of hundreds of thousands of dollars. YOULUS, who billed himself as the "Jewish Indiana Jones," fabricated detailed accounts of having found Torahs lost or hidden during the Holocaust in Europe, including in Auschwitz and the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, and in other places around the world. He then used those false accounts as a platform for soliciting contributions to Save a Torah, some of which he embezzled by diverting them directly into his personal bank accounts. In other instances, YOULUS allegedly submitted inflated and doctored invoices to Save a Torah to increase the amount he was reimbursed by the charity for the "rescued" Torahs, which, in at least some instances, he had simply purchased from other Torah dealers.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA said: "Menachem Youlus called himself the 'Jewish Indiana Jones,' but his alleged exploits were no more real than those of the movie character he claimed to resemble. He chose poorly in allegedly exploiting an excruciating chapter in Jewish and international history to perpetrate a brazen fraud that played on the heartstrings of the

people for whom the painful memories of that period will never die."

New York USPIS Inspector-in-Charge RONALD J. VERROCHIO said: "Postal Inspectors are committed to protecting the public from fraud and deceitful advertisements, regardless of the items being sold. In this case, Menachem Youlus made false statements and re-wrote history to deceive consumers to believe the Torahs they were purchasing had a historical value so meaningful to the victims. Along with the U.S. Attorney, Postal Inspectors will always pursue individuals who prey on victims' money and their emotions."

As alleged in the Complaint unsealed today:

MENACHEM YOULUS co-founded the Save a Torah charity in 2004 with the stated mission of rescuing Torah scrolls that had been lost or hidden during the Holocaust, or in connection with the persecution of Jewish communities in other locations around the world. YOULUS claimed to have personally traveled to locations throughout the world to carry out his search and rescue missions for lost Torahs. Save a Torah then donated or sold the purportedly rescued Torahs to Jewish communities, synagogues, and individuals in the United States and elsewhere, and touted YOULUS's accounts of how the Torahs were rescued to raise over \$1.2 million in contributions between 2004 and 2010.

YOULUS's accounts of Torah rescue were false, and were contradicted by historical evidence, witness accounts, and records showing that YOULUS passed off Torahs as rescued that lacked any connection to the Holocaust, and had actually been purchased from local Torah dealers. Moreover, records of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE"), reflect that YOULUS did not travel internationally, and appears never to have left the United States, during many of the same years in which he claimed to have been locating and rescuing Torahs from abroad.

For example, YOULUS claimed that, in 2002, he discovered a Torah that was hidden during World War II at the Bergen Belsen concentration camp in Germany, which is now a national memorial museum. Specifically, YOULUS claimed that during a visit to the concentration camp, he fell through the floorboards of a barracks where, after hours of digging, the Bergen-Belsen Torah was discovered. YOULUS's account, however, was contradicted by historical evidence showing that the barracks at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp were completely destroyed by the British Army several weeks after the camp was liberated at the end of World War II. Furthermore, contrary to his claim to have traveled to Germany in 2002, travel records showed that

YOULUS did not travel internationally at any time between early 2001 and August 2004.

In another example, YOULUS claimed to have rescued a Torah in 2004 from Auschwitz, Poland, which Save a Torah later sold for \$32,000 to a donor, who then gave it to a synagogue in New York, New York. Specifically, according to one newspaper report, YOULUS used a metal detector to locate the Torah buried in the ground in Auschwitz, and furthermore, that a local priest gave YOULUS four missing panels of the Torah which the priest (whom YOULUS said died shortly after their 2004 encounter) had safeguarded for Jews who perished in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

As set forth in the Complaint, however, YOULUS's account was contradicted by evidence that he met with a Holocaust historian in 2007 (i.e., three years after the supposed rescue) to learn about the historian's as-of-yet unsuccessful efforts to locate a Torah in Auschwitz, and to borrow the historian's documents related to those efforts, which YOULUS immediately used to falsely claim that he had previously found a Torah at Auschwitz. In addition, contrary to his claim to have traveled to Auschwitz in 2004, as reflected in travel records, during the entire year 2004, YOULUS left the United States only once, for a trip to Israel.

As further alleged in the Complaint, YOULUS profited from the scheme in several ways. He embezzled donations to Save a Torah, and used money from the charity for his personal enrichment, notwithstanding his representations that he received no salary or financial benefit from his work for Save a Torah. Among other things, YOULUS allegedly submitted fraudulent, inflated invoices to Save a Torah for the purported costs of rescuing the Torahs. He also misappropriated at least \$145,000 in charitable donations by secretly depositing those donations into the bank account of his business in Maryland, the Jewish Bookstore, without the authorization of Save a Torah or the donors.

YOULUS also allegedly obtained or attempted to obtain hundreds of thousands of additional dollars from Save a Torah by falsely representing that he had gone into significant debt to find and acquire "rescued" Torahs. Bank records show, however, that YOULUS had substantial assets when he made those representations, and that he used the monies given to him by Save a Torah not to pay off his alleged debts, but to invest in a Certificate of Deposit at his bank.

* * *

YOULUS, 50, of Wheaton, Maryland, surrendered this morning, and is scheduled to be presented before U.S. Magistrate Judge James A. Francis IV later today. YOULUS is charged with one count of mail fraud and one count of wire fraud. Each count carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000, twice the gross gain to the defendant, or twice the gross loss to others, whichever is greatest.

Mr. BHARARA praised the investigative work of the USPIS, and noted that the investigation is ongoing.

The case is being handled by the Office's Complex Frauds Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys NICOLE FRIEDLANDER and JANIS ECHENBERG are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Complaint are merely accusations and the defendant charged in the Complaint is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

11-256

###