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**U.S. ANNOUNCES TAKEDOWN OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS-
TRAFFICKING ENTERPRISE RESPONSIBLE FOR SMUGGLING MORE
THAN 25 TONS OF KHAT FROM AFRICA INTO THE UNITED STATES**

*Manhattan U.S. Attorney Charges 44 Members of Criminal
Enterprise; Authorities Seize More Than \$2 Million Worth of Khat
and Dismantle International Hawala Money-Laundering Network*

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, JOHN P. GILBRIDE, the Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Office of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and MARK J. MERSHON, the Assistant Director-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), joined by WAYNE E. BENNETT, Superintendent of the New York State Police, MARTIN D. FICKE, Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), RAYMOND W. KELLY, Police Commissioner of the City of New York (NYPD), and MICHAEL J. THOMAS, the Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation Division (IRS), working collectively through the New York OCDETF Strike Force, announced today the coordinated takedown of a 44-member international narcotics-trafficking organization responsible for smuggling more than 25 tons of khat -- worth more than \$10 million -- from the Horn of Africa to the United States.

Earlier this morning, law enforcement authorities across the United States simultaneously arrested 30 members of

the criminal organization, and the remaining defendants are currently being sought. During the 18-month investigation, authorities seized more than 5 tons of khat -- worth more than \$2 million -- that was destined for United States communities. The indictment announced today represents the largest khat-trafficking prosecution in United States history.

According to the indictment announced today, khat is a plant cultivated in Kenya and Ethiopia. Among the active ingredients in khat are cathinone, a stimulant classified as a Schedule I controlled substance under United States law, and cathine, which is classified as a Schedule IV controlled substance, it was charged. According to the Indictment, users of khat chew the leaves and young shoots of the plant, swallowing the juice and storing the residue in the side of the mouth until the cheek bulges. The primary effects of chewing khat are euphoria and stimulation, and side effects include anorexia, heart disease, hypertension, cancer of the mouth, disorientation, gastric disorders, hallucination, hyperactivity, hypertension, impotence, insomnia, outbursts of irrational violence, and, in exceptional cases, toxic psychosis, it was charged.

According to the Indictment, khat is most potent when used within days of cultivation. Khat traffickers, therefore, must operate efficiently to transport khat from the Horn of Africa, where it is cultivated, to khat users in the United States and Europe, it was alleged. To this end, khat is harvested daily in Kenya and Ethiopia. To maintain moisture and freshness, khat exporters use banana leaves to wrap individual plants into bundles. According to the Indictment, each bundle typically contains 15 to 35 plants. After the khat plants are harvested and wrapped into bundles, khat traffickers transport the bundles of khat by airplane from Kenya and Ethiopia to Western Europe. Khat traffickers then utilize two principal techniques to import khat from Western Europe into the United States for further distribution: (a) human couriers who fly on commercial aircraft with suitcases containing khat; and (b) express mail deliveries, it was alleged.

Between December 2004 and July 2006, the 44 members of the international khat-trafficking organization (the Organization) charged today smuggled more than 25 tons of khat -- with a street value of more than \$10 million -- into the United States for retail distribution, it was charged. The Organization imported and distributed khat into and within the United States by (1) arranging for shipments of khat from Africa to be carried from London to New York by human couriers flying on commercial airlines, or sending packages containing khat from the United

Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, and other countries in Western Europe to New York using commercial express mail services; and (2) retrieving the khat in New York and sending it by land to Ohio, Minnesota, Maine, Massachusetts, Utah, Washington, Illinois, the District of Columbia, and other states where the khat was sold on the streets.

According to the Indictment, once the khat was sold, the Organization utilized "hawalas" -- informal networks of money remitters commonly used in Africa and the Middle East to transfer money -- to launder the khat proceeds. Between December 2004 and July 2006, members of the Organization delivered millions of dollars of khat proceeds to hawalas in New York, Minnesota, and other places throughout the United States, it was charged. The Organization's hawaladars then reconciled their hawala accounts with other co-conspirators in Europe, Africa, and Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and wire transferred a portion of the khat proceeds from bank accounts in the United States to bank accounts in Dubai for the benefit of the khat suppliers, it was charged.

The Organization discussed violence and made threats of violence to control its criminal khat-trafficking enterprise, it was alleged. In or about June 2006, BASHI MUSE, one of the leaders of the Organization, spoke over the telephone with a co-conspirator about efforts to kill a khat customer who MUSE suspected of stealing khat from him, it was charged. According to the Indictment, MUSE also left a voicemail message for the khat customer he suspected of stealing from him, stating: "Be prepared for your death. I swear to God you will die."

According to the Indictment, the following defendants played the following roles in carrying out the Organization's khat-trafficking crimes:

- Leaders/Organizers -- BASHI MUSE, ALI AWAD, a/k/a "Alex," a/k/a "Ali Osman," ABDI EMIL MOGE, a/k/a "Abdi Ilmoge," and OSMAN OSMAN were the principal leaders of the Organization's khat-trafficking activities. MUSE was responsible for the Organization's importation of khat into New York using human couriers. MOGE was a principal distributor of the Organization's khat in Minnesota. AWAD, assisted and advised by OSMAN, was responsible for the Organization's importation of khat into New York using express mail packages. OSMAN, who was employed at the United Nations, used the United Nations diplomatic pouch to

smuggle khat into the United States.

- Regional Distributors -- OMER ALI ABDIRIZAK, a/k/a "Abdulrazak," a/k/a "Antenno," MOHAMED AHMED, a/k/a "Mohamed Sharif," a/k/a "Halloween," SAEED BAJUUN, YASIR MOHAMED, a/k/a "Nadif," SOFIA ROBLES, a/k/a "Marcus," ISSE ALI SALAD, DAHIR ABDULLE SHIRE, a/k/a "Jarato," MOHAHMED ABDILLAHI MOHAMED, a/k/a "Garad," ABDULKADIR SHIRE, a/k/a "Fanah," ISMAIL ALI MOHAMED, a/k/a "Ali Bidar," MOHAMED JAMA, a/k/a "Jibouti," HASSAN SADIQ MOHAMED, a/k/a "Gacal," MUHIDIN MOHAMED, a/k/a "Muqabelow," LIBAN HASHI, BASHIR AHMED, MOHAMED ALI, a/k/a "Will Isse," AHMED ISMAIL, a/k/a "Bistollo," MOHAMED ALI, a/k/a "Ali Ali," ABDULAHI HUSSEIN, AHMED SHERIF HASHIM, MAXAMED ABSHAR, HUSSEIN AHMED MOHAMED, ABSHIR AHMED, a/k/a "Liban," LIBAN ABDULLE, and ISMACIIL GELLE were among the Organization's regional distributors responsible for coordinating the distribution of the khat, imported by MUSE, AWAD, and MOGE, to retail outlets in, among other places, New York, Ohio, Minnesota, Maine, Massachusetts, Utah, and Washington.
- Transporters -- AHMED MOHAMOUD EGAL, a/k/a "Arabey," MOHAMED SHIREH, DEKO OHERSI, a/k/a "Dega," ABDUL HERSI, a/k/a "Hurwa," WELI MOHAMED ABDI, a/k/a "Shine," WARFA ABDI DIRIE, a/k/a "Jeri," HASSAN YUSUF, MAHAMUD AFDHUB, WARSAME GULED, ISSE ABDIWAAB, a/k/a "Numberka," YOUNAS HAJI, MOHAMED MOHAMED, a/k/a "Tegro," ABDIAZIS SALAH MOHAMED, a/k/a "Alcohol," and OMAR OSMAN MOHAMED were transporters for the Organization and responsible for moving shipments of khat from one city to another city within the United States.
- Money Launderers -- ABDINUR AHMED DAHIR, a/k/a "Abdiqadir Husserin," and ALI DUALEH, a/k/a "Xidig," were among the Organization's principal money launderers and were responsible for receiving cash proceeds from the khat traffickers and arranging for the money to be laundered through bank accounts in the United States to bank accounts in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, for the benefit of the khat suppliers in Europe and Africa.

The Indictment announced today charged all 44 members of the Organization with conspiracy to commit khat-trafficking crimes. MUSE, AWAD, MOGE, DAHIR, and DUALEH also were charged with conspiracy to commit money-laundering crimes. The Indictment also charged MUSE, AWAD, and MOGE with serving as leaders of a continuing criminal enterprise.

In a related investigation, a federal grand jury in Seattle has indicted 18 people for khat importation and distribution. During a six-month investigation authorities seized more than 1,000 pounds of khat shipped into the Seattle area. Shipments were arriving almost daily from European shippers to a variety of Seattle addresses.

The historic khat takedown announced today is the culmination of "Operation Somalia Express," a coordinated law enforcement operation involving cooperation between federal, state, and local authorities working collectively through OCDETF. Mr. GARCIA praised the investigative efforts of the DEA, the FBI, the New York State Police, the IRS Criminal Investigation Division, ICE, the NYPD, and the United States Marshals Service (working together as part of the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) Strike Force); the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force in New York; and the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, the Nassau County Police Department, and the Hennepin County Sheriff's Department in Minnesota.

If convicted, all the charged defendants face a maximum sentence of 20 years' imprisonment on the khat-trafficking charges. MUSE, AWAD, MOGE, DAHIR, and DUALEH face an additional maximum sentence of 20 years' imprisonment on the money-laundering charges. Additionally, MUSE, AWAD, and MOGE face a mandatory minimum sentence of 20 years' imprisonment and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment on the continuing criminal enterprise charges.

The prosecutions are being handled by the Office's International Narcotics Trafficking Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys DANIEL STEIN and GURUANJAN SAHNI are in charge of the prosecutions.

The charges contained in the Indictment announced today are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.