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**ARMS TRAFFICKER SENTENCED TO 22 YEARS FOR PLOT TO
SMUGGLE SHOULDER-FIRED SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES,
ROCKET-PROPELLED GRENADES, AND OTHER MILITARY WEAPONS**

LEV L. DASSIN, the Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that ARTUR SOLOMONYAN, 30, the leader of an international arms trafficking operation, was sentenced today to 22 years in prison for plotting to smuggle shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles ("SAMs"), rocket-propelled grenades ("RPGs"), anti-tank guided missiles, and other high-powered military weapons into the United States for sale. United States District Judge RICHARD J. HOLWELL imposed the sentence today in Manhattan federal court.

SOLOMONYAN, and his co-defendants CHRISTIAAN SPIES and IOSEB KHARABADZE, were found guilty on July 24, 2007 following a one-month jury trial, of conspiring to smuggle SAMs, RPGs, machine guns, and other high-powered weapons from Eastern Europe into the United States. The jury also found SOLOMONYAN and SPIES guilty of illegally trafficking in machine guns and other assault weapons.

According to the evidence at trial:

From December 2003 to March 15, 2005, SOLOMONYAN, SPIES, and KHARABADZE brokered a deal to import RPGs, SAMs, anti-tank missile systems, and other military weapons from Eastern Europe into the United States, for sale to a confidential informant ("CI") posing as an arms trafficker. SOLOMONYAN and SPIES met with the CI in New York City on several occasions to discuss the details of their weapons deal, including the specifications and prices of various weapons that the defendants could ship. In June 2004, at a meeting in New York City, SOLOMONYAN and SPIES provided the CI with a price list of weapons obtained from KHARABADZE that day -- a list that included RPGs, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, AK-47s, and Claymore mines. In February 2005, SOLOMONYAN and SPIES provided the CI with digital

photographs of military weapons in Armenia that they proposed to import into the United States for sale to the CI. These photographs, which the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI") determined were taken in late February 2005, included such weapons as: surface-to-air heat seeking anti-aircraft missiles, an anti-tank guided missile and launcher, a mortar launcher, recoilless anti-tank guns, and fully automatic AK-74 and AK-47 assault rifles.

The FBI arrested SOLOMONYAN, SPIES, and KHARABADZE before any of them could travel outside of the United States to obtain these weapons.

In addition, while SOLOMONYAN and SPIES were arranging to import the military weapons from Eastern Europe, they sold to the CI and delivered one machine gun and seven assault weapons. The assault weapons included a Norinco Model NHM91 semi-automatic assault rifle, an Israel Military Industries Model A Uzi, an Interdynamic Model KG-9 or "TEC-9" semi-automatic assault pistol, a Norinco MAC-90 Sporter semi-automatic assault rifle, three AK-47s, and two conversion kits intended to convert AK-47s into fully-automatic machine guns.

Judge HOLWELL has previously sentenced 15 other related defendants convicted of firearms trafficking offenses in connection with this investigation, including DMITRIY VOROBAYCHIK (33 months), NIKOLAI NADIRASHVILI (41 months) and LEVAN CHVELIDZE (34 months), who were convicted at trial in July 2007 along with SOLOMONYAN, SPIES, and KHARABADZE. KHARABADZE is scheduled to be sentenced on March 11, 2009, at 2:30 p.m. SPIES is scheduled to be sentenced on March 18, 2009, at 2 p.m.

Mr. DASSIN praised the work of the FBI and the New York City Police Department in their handling of this investigation. Mr. DASSIN also expressed his thanks to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement for their assistance.

Assistant United States Attorneys MARC P. BERGER and DAVID B. MASSEY are in charge of the prosecution.

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