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**UNITED STATES ANNOUNCES ARREST OF TALIBAN-LINKED
AFGHAN HEROIN TRAFFICKER ON CHARGES OF
CONSPIRING TO IMPORT MILLIONS OF
DOLLARS WORTH OF HEROIN**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and KAREN P. TANDY, the Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Agency ("DEA"), announced today the arrest of MOHAMMAD ESSA, a/k/a "Haji Saheb," a/k/a "Abdullah," who is charged with conspiring to import approximately \$25 million worth of heroin from Afghanistan and Pakistan into the United States and other countries. ESSA, previously in custody in Afghanistan, consented to his removal to the United States, and arrived in New York on April 27, 2007; he was presented in Magistrate Court and was ordered detained pending trial. ESSA's first appearance before United States District Judge DENNY CHIN took place this afternoon. According to the Indictment and statements made during ESSA's first appearance in Manhattan federal court:

From approximately 1990 until January 2005, ESSA was a member of an international heroin trafficking organization led by BAZ MOHAMMAD (the "Baz Mohammad Organization"), an organization that was responsible for manufacturing and transporting hundreds of kilograms of heroin in Afghanistan and Pakistan. During the course of the conspiracy, the Baz Mohammad Organization controlled opium fields in Afghanistan where poppies were grown and harvested to generate opium. After the opium was harvested, the Baz Mohammad Organization used laboratories in Afghanistan and Pakistan to process the opium into heroin. The Organization then arranged to transport the heroin from Afghanistan into the United States and other countries where it was sold for tens of

millions of dollars. ESSA is one of the co-conspirators alleged to have managed the distribution of heroin by the Baz Mohammad Organization's operatives in the United States and elsewhere.

The Baz Mohammad Organization was closely aligned with the Taliban in Afghanistan, and allegedly provided financial support to the Taliban in Afghanistan. In exchange for this support, the Taliban provided the Baz Mohammad Organization with protection for its opium crops, heroin laboratories, drug-transportation routes, and members and associates. From 1994 through 2000, ESSA and his co-conspirators collected heroin proceeds in the United States for the Taliban.

(As announced in previous releases by this Office, MOHAMMAD, a foreign narcotics kingpin designated under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act, was extradited from Afghanistan to the United States in October 2005 -- the first such extradition in history. MOHAMMAD was extradited pursuant to Article 3(1) of the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. MOHAMMAD pleaded guilty on July 11, 2006, to conspiring to import heroin into the United States. MOHAMMAD faces a maximum sentence of life in prison and a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years' imprisonment.)

Mr. GARCIA praised the investigative efforts of the New York and New Jersey Field Divisions of the DEA. Mr. GARCIA also commended the work of the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force, which is comprised of law enforcement agencies including the DEA, New York City Police Department, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Internal Revenue Service, Federal Bureau of Investigation and the New York State Police.

Mr. GARCIA added: "This important arrest reflects our continuing cooperation with law enforcement partners around the world to combat international narcotics trafficking. Our coordinated efforts are vital both because of the harm that drug trafficking causes in the United States and because of the destabilizing influence that drug trafficking has on Afghanistan."

"If you want a clear picture of the link between drugs and terrorism, look at MOHAMMAD ESSA," said DEA Administrator TANDY. "ESSA is a terrorist and a trafficker -- as part of the Baz Mohammad trafficking group he supported the insurgency in Afghanistan with drug profits, and helped carry out BAZ MOHAMMAD's 'jihad' against the U.S. by supplying tens of millions of dollars of heroin to our country. An adversary of American

democracy, ESSA will now face one of its finest institutions -- the American justice system."

The return of ESSA was made possible through the consent and assistance of the Afghan justice officials and the support of the DEA Country Office and the DOJ Senior Federal Prosecutors Program in Kabul.

This prosecution is being handled by the International Narcotics Trafficking Unit of the United States Attorney's Office. Assistant United States Attorneys AMY FINZI and JOCELYN E. STRAUBER are in charge of the prosecution.

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

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