



U.S. Department of Justice

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## PRESS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Thursday, May 13, 2004

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**Jordanian hijacker sentenced to 160 years in prison for deadly 1986 hijacking  
of Pam Am Flight 73 as victims from around the world recount horrors**

Washington, D.C. - Attorney General John Ashcroft, United States Attorney Roscoe C. Howard, Jr., and Michael A. Mason, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Washington Field Office, announced that Zaid Hassan Abd Latif Safarini, 42, a citizen of Jordan, was sentenced to 160 years in prison today before U.S. District Judge Emmet G. Sullivan for his role in the deadly hijacking of Pan American Flight 73 on September 5, 1986, in Karachi, Pakistan, following a two-day sentencing hearing. The Court also made a recommendation to the Bureau of Prisons that the defendant serve his sentence at the ADX Florence, Colorado federal correctional institute, which is a super maximum facility. More than 50 victims and family members from around the world attended the sentencing, many providing powerful, emotional and compelling testimony about the devastation caused by this terrorist attack. There were approximately 379 people on board the aircraft at the time of the hijacking, including approximately 78 United States citizens. At least 21 people were killed during the hijacking, including citizens of the United States, Pakistan, India and Mexico.

"The severity of the sentence imposed against Safarini underscores the brutality of his terrorist acts against innocent civilian lives," said Attorney General John Ashcroft. "We are honored by the dignity of the victims and their families, who have traveled to this sentencing proceeding from near and far, to advise the court and the world how these

atrocious acts have impacted their lives. This case demonstrates the commitment of the United States to secure justice for the victims of terrorist acts, no matter how long it takes.”

In December 2003, Safarini pleaded guilty to all 95 counts against him, including murder of United States nationals outside the United States, attempt to commit air piracy resulting in death, placing a destructive device on an aircraft resulting in death, hostage taking and 76 counts of attempt to murder United States nationals outside the United States. Under the plea agreement, the government agreed not to litigate further the Court’s prior ruling that the death penalty was not available in this case. In exchange, Safarini agreed, among other things, to be sentenced to the maximum term of imprisonment on each count, for a total sentence of three consecutive life terms plus 25 years, which is equivalent to 160 years in prison, and to cooperate “whenever, and in whatever form, the United States shall reasonably request,” including by testifying against his co-defendants, if and when any of them comes into United States custody.

Judge Sullivan had ruled in April 2003 that the death penalty was not available against Safarini in this case. The government had filed a motion asking the Court to reconsider that ruling and the government’s motion was still pending at the time the plea agreement was announced.

Present in court over the last two days were more than 50 victims and family members from around the world and across the country. Many of these victims spoke at the proceeding, providing moving testimony about the many ways in which this horrific terrorist attack changed their lives forever. As one witness told the court, “Our lives have never been the same since this incident. Like an animal hit by a speeding truck, each one of us in our family, and every other victim of this (and every other terrorist incident) is left bewildered by such a tragedy.” Other victims traveled to the sentencing simply to bear witness to the sentencing of the man who led this fatal attack against them and their family members.

“Today is a powerful and remarkable day for justice and the victims of crime,” said U.S. Attorney Roscoe C. Howard, Jr. “The opportunity for the many victims who were on

Pan Am Flight 73 to share with the court the horror and nightmare of that day in 1986 and then bear witness to the defendant receiving his life sentence is a testament to the world that the United States never forgets. We remain steadfast in our commitment to bring to justice those who commit cowardly acts of terrorism against the United States.”

The hijacking of Pan Am Flight 73 was one of the most brutal international terrorist attacks to occur in the 1980s. The incident began as passengers were boarding the aircraft for a flight that had originated in Bombay, India, and was scheduled to fly to Frankfurt, Germany, en route to New York. At the sentencing hearing, Assistant United States Attorney Gregg A. Maisel and DOJ Trial Attorney Jennifer E. Levy provided a detailed factual account of the crime, based on Safarini’s previous admissions, accompanied by a presentation of related visual images. On the day of the hijacking, Safarini and his fellow hijackers were dressed as Karachi airport security guards and armed with assault rifles, pistols, grenades and plastic explosive belts. At approximately 6:00 a.m. local time, Safarini drove a van that had been modified to look like an airport security vehicle through a security checkpoint at the Karachi airport, without challenge, and drove up to one of the stairways being used to board passengers for Pan Am Flight 73. Safarini and his three fellow hijackers stormed up the stairways onto the plane, fired shots from an automatic weapon and seized control of the aircraft. Some of the flight attendants were able to alert the cockpit crew about the hijacking by intercom, allowing the pilot, co-pilot and flight engineer to escape through a hatch in the cockpit before the hijackers reached the cockpit, thereby effectively grounding the aircraft.

Over the next approximately 16 hours, Safarini, as the leader of the hijackers on board the aircraft, demanded the return of a flight crew to fly the aircraft to Larnaca, Cyprus, where Safarini and his fellow hijackers wanted to secure the release of Palestinian prisoners being detained in Cyprus. During the course of negotiations between Safarini and Pakistani authorities, Safarini threatened to kill all of the passengers.

Within a short time after seizing control of the aircraft, Safarini ordered the flight attendants to collect the passports of passengers. The flight attendants complied with this

request but, risking their own lives, they surreptitiously declined to collect some of the United States passports and hid other United States passports from the hijackers. After the passports had been collected, Safarini walked through the cabin of the aircraft, asking passengers about their nationalities. When he arrived at the seat of Rajesh Kumar, a 29-year-old California resident who had recently been naturalized as an American citizen, Safarini ordered Mr. Kumar to come to the front of the aircraft, to kneel at the front doorway of the aircraft and to face the front of the aircraft with his hands behind his head. At approximately 10:00 a.m., Safarini became angry about the delay in complying with his demand for a new flight crew and he threatened that he would shoot Mr. Kumar if something was not done within 15 minutes. Shortly thereafter, Safarini grabbed Mr. Kumar and shot him in the head in front of witnesses both on and off the aircraft. Safarini then heaved Mr. Kumar out of the door onto the tarmac below. Pakistani personnel on the tarmac reported that Mr. Kumar was still breathing when he was placed in an ambulance, but he was pronounced dead shortly after arriving at a hospital in Karachi.

As the hours wore on and nightfall came, the lights on the aircraft began to dim and flicker, due to a mechanical failure. At Safarini's instruction, the hijackers herded the passengers and crew members into the center section of the aircraft. Safarini and one other hijacker positioned themselves in front of the crowd of passengers in the right and left aisles, while the two other hijackers positioned themselves behind the crowd of passengers and crew in the right and left aisles. On Safarini's signal, after the hijackers recited a martyrdom prayer in Arabic, and after the lights on the aircraft had gone out, the four hijackers opened fire on the assembled passengers and crew, throwing hand grenades into the crowd and spraying the trapped passengers with automatic weapons fire, attempting to kill as many passengers and crew members as possible. At least 20 additional passengers and crew were killed during this final deadly assault, including a second United States citizen, 50-year-old Surendra Patel, the father of three children, two of whom were next to him on the aircraft when he was shot. Scores of other passengers were injured. Most of the surviving passengers and crew, including 76 United States citizens,

escaped through two doors of the plane which were forced open by heroic passengers and flight attendants when the firing began. Many passengers and crew were forced to jump from the wing of the aircraft onto the tarmac in order to escape the hijackers.

Safarini and his fellow hijackers committed the offenses charged in this case as members of the Abu Nidal Organization, also called the ANO, a foreign terrorist organization. Safarini and the other hijackers were initially prosecuted in Pakistan and convicted of numerous crimes resulting from the hijacking. Safarini served 15 years in prison in Pakistan before being released by Pakistani authorities and then apprehended by United States law enforcement personnel in late September 2001.

In announcing today's sentencing, Attorney General Ashcroft, United States Attorney Howard, and Assistant Director in Charge Mason commended the investigative work of FBI Special Agents Robert B. Deardorff, Michael O'Callaghan, T. Gregory Naples, Jr. and Scott Jessee, as well as numerous other FBI agents who contributed to this investigation over the course of many years, as well as those who participated in his capture. In addition, they commended Eugene Lee of the U.S. Attorney's Office and Stacy M. Gundrum of the FBI for their tremendously successful efforts in locating victims and family members, among other contributions. They also gratefully acknowledged the funding from the Office of Victims of Crime and the Executive Office of United States Attorneys, which allowed so many victims and family members to attend the sentencing. Moreover, they expressed their appreciation to U.S. Attorney's Office Victim-Witness Unit Chief Heather Cartwright and FBI Office of Victim Assistance Director Kathryn Turman for their leadership on victim-witness issues in this case. Further, they commended the following individuals from the United States Attorney's Office for their tireless work to arrange for the travel of such a large group of victims: Gregory Nelson, LaJune Thames, Janet Brown, Iris Savoy, Sarah Wallace (intern) and Kiersten Brent (student). In addition, they commended victim-witness advocates Lorraine Chase and Yvonne Bryant of the United States Attorney's Office for providing much-needed emotional support and guidance for the victims, as well as the numerous other victim-witness advocates who

provided assistance during the sentencing. Further, they commended Lisa G. Bailey and Daniel Scott Davey of the FBI Laboratory in Quantico, Virginia, for their work creating visual displays for the case. They also commended U.S. Attorney's Office employees LaTasha Sams, Karen Evans, Debbie Dunn, Amy Kline and Karen Kress and former legal intern (now Assistant U.S. Attorney) Margaret Sewell for their support on the case. Finally, they commended Assistant U.S. Attorney Gregg A. Maisel and DOJ Trial Attorney Jennifer E. Levy, the prosecutors handling the case.

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