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Contact: Thom Mrozek
Director of Media Relations

thom.mrozek@usdoj.gov

(213) 894-6947

California Man Sentenced to 15 Months in Federal Prison for Scheming to Defraud Afghan Government on U.S.-Funded Contract

LOS ANGELES – A former Orange County resident has been sentenced to 15 months in prison for his role in a scheme to defraud the government of Afghanistan out of more than \$110 million in funds provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to construct an electrical grid in Afghanistan.

Saed Ismail Amiri, 38, who now lives in the Northern California community of Granite Bay, but who resided in Irvine at the time of the offense, was sentenced on Tuesday by United States District Judge Stanley Blumenfeld Jr. after pleading guilty in April to one count of wire fraud.

According to court documents, Amiri was at various times either the owner or senior consultant of Assist Consultants Inc. (ACI). In or around January 2015, USAID, in connection with the U.S. effort to assist Afghanistan and its people, authorized the national power utility of Afghanistan, Da' Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), to solicit bids on a U.S.-funded contract to construct five electric power substations. Bids were sought only from companies that had substantial experience building electric power substations. Specifically, the contract criteria required bidders, such as ACI, to have previously worked on two electric substations of 220 kilovolts or more.

In 2015 and 2016, Amiri, ACI employees, and others engaged in a scheme to obtain the contract by submitting a false work history and fraudulent supporting documents in an effort to deceive DABS into believing that ACI met the required contract criteria. In July 2015, ACI submitted a bid on the contract for \$112,292,241, which underbid its competitors by more than \$20 million. In the bid, ACI stated that it had worked as a subcontractor to a prime contractor on two 220 kilovolt substations for a cement factory in Uganda and a textile company in Nigeria. In fact, the alleged prime contractor was a fictitious company that ACI had invented and controlled, ACI had never worked to build a substation in Africa, and neither the Ugandan cement factory nor the Nigerian textile company existed.

In February 2016, after Amiri had returned to Southern California and after DABS had requested supporting documents to verify ACI's work history, Amiri sent emails to co-conspirators, some of which advised that some of them would need to go to Uganda and Nigeria to obtain false documents to respond to DABS.

After again leaving the United States, Amiri emailed DABS documents he knew were false and altered, including ACI's purported subcontract to work on the Ugandan substation, photographs, false bank records, and a bogus letter purporting to be from a Ugandan government official.

After submitting the fake records to DABS, Amiri met with U.S. law enforcement at the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan and falsely stated, among other things, that he had learned the prior month that ACI had bid on the contract. Shortly thereafter, Amiri withdrew ACI's bid. In a subsequent interview with law enforcement, Amiri also falsely stated that another ACI employee had submitted the false documents to DABS, when in truth and in fact, Amiri had emailed the false documents himself.

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) and USAID's Office of Inspector General investigated this case.

Assistant United States Attorney Jeff Mitchell of the Major Frauds Section and Justice Department Trial Attorney Matt Kahn of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section prosecuted the case