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Former Congressman Sentenced for Obstructing Justice, IARA Ex-Officials Sentenced for Transferring More Than \$1 Million to Iraq

WASHINGTON, DC — Mark Deli Siljander, a former Michigan congressman and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, was sentenced in federal court on January 11, 2012, for obstruction of justice and for acting as an unregistered foreign agent related to his work for an Islamic charity with ties to international terrorism. Several officials and employees of that charity, the now-defunct Islamic American Relief Agency (IARA) formerly headquartered in Columbia, Mo., also were sentenced in federal court on January 11.

“A Missouri charity secretly funneled more than a million dollars to Iraq in violation of United States economic sanctions,” said Beth Phillips, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Missouri. “IARA then hired a former congressman to lobby the government on its behalf after it was listed as a specially designated global terrorist organization.”

Siljander, 60, of Great Falls, Va., was sentenced to one year and one day in federal prison without parole. Siljander was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Michigan and was a U.S. ambassador to the United Nations General Assembly. Siljander operated a Washington, D.C., consulting business called Global Strategies, Inc.

IARA served as the U.S. office of an international organization headquartered in Khartoum, Sudan. IARA was closed in October 2004, after being identified by the U.S. Treasury Department as a specially designated global terrorist organization with ties to Osama bin Laden, al-Qaida and the Taliban.

IARA Executive Director Mubarak Hamed, 55, of Columbia, a naturalized U.S. citizen originally from Sudan, was sentenced to four years and 10 months in federal prison without parole. IARA fundraiser Abdel Azim El-Siddig, 55, of Chicago, Ill., was sentenced to two years of probation.

IARA board member Ali Mohamed Bagegni, 57, a native of Libya who is a naturalized U.S. citizen and former resident of Columbia, and IARA fundraiser Ahmad Mustafa, 59, of Columbia, a citizen of Iraq and a lawful permanent resident alien, were each sentenced to six months of probation.

“I wish to acknowledge the outstanding work of the investigators and prosecutors involved with this case,” said Michael G. Carroll, Acting Inspector General for U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). “We remain committed to holding individuals accountable who violate U.S. laws by supporting international terrorist organizations. I sincerely hope that this will serve as a clear warning.

We will continue to bring forth all of the necessary resources of the U.S. Government to identify and prosecute violators with terrorist affiliations.”

Hamed pleaded guilty on June 25, 2010, to conspiring to illegally transfer more than \$1 million to Iraq in violation of federal sanctions, and to obstructing the administration of the laws governing tax-exempt charities. Hamed used IARA to solicit charitable contributions throughout the United States, taking in between \$1 million and \$3 million in contributions annually from 1991 to 2003, and then illegally transferred funds to Iraq with the assistance of a Jordanian identified by the U.S. Treasury Department as a specially designated global terrorist.

Hamed and El-Siddig hired Siljander in 2004 to lobby for IARA’s removal from a U.S. Senate Finance Committee list of charities suspected of funding international terrorism, and its reinstatement as an approved government contractor. IARA lost its status as an approved government contractor in 1999, when USAID terminated grants for two relief projects in Mali, Africa. USAID informed the organization that the grants were not in the national security interest of the United States.

Siljander, Hamed and El-Siddig agreed with each other to conceal Siljander’s efforts on IARA’s behalf. In order to do so, Siljander instructed Hamed and El-Siddig to transfer \$75,000 of IARA’s funds to him by funneling them through nonprofit entities.

In exchange for the payments, during the summer of 2004, Siljander acted as an agent for IARA by contacting persons at the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, USAID, the Department of Justice, and the Department of the Army, in an effort to have IARA removed from the USAID list of debarred entities, and to remove IARA from the Senate Finance Committee’s list of charities suspected of funding terrorism.

Siljander admitted that in two separate interviews he repeatedly lied to FBI agents and prosecutors acting on behalf of a federal grand jury. Siljander obstructed justice by falsely denying that he was hired to advocate for IARA, and by falsely claiming that the payments from IARA were charitable donations intended to assist him in writing a book about bridging the gap between Islam and Christianity.

The case was investigated by USAID’s Office of the Inspector General, the FBI and IRS-Criminal Investigation. This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Anthony P. Gonzalez, Steven M. Mohlhenrich, Dan Stewart and Brian Casey from the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Missouri, and Trial Attorney Paul G. Casey from the National Security Division of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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