

United States Attorney Preet Bharara

Southern District of New York

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CONTACT: YUSILL

SCRIBNER

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REBEKAH

CARMICHAEL

[HTTP://WWW.USDOJ.GOV/USAO/NYS](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/nys)

JANICE

OH

PHONE: (212) 637-2600

**MANHATTAN U.S. ATTORNEY CHARGES THREE AL QAEDA ASSOCIATES
WITH CONSPIRING TO TRANSPORT COCAINE THROUGH AFRICA FOR
THE FARC**

NEW YORK - Preet Bharara, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and Michele M. Leonhart, the Acting Administrator of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), announced that Oumar Issa, Harouna Touré and Idriss Abelrahman arrived in the Southern District of New York early this morning to face charges of conspiracy to commit acts of narco-terrorism and conspiracy to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization. The charges stem from the defendants' alleged agreement to transport cocaine through West and North Africa with the intent to support three terrorist organizations -- Al Qaeda, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM), and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC). All three organizations have been designated by the U.S. Department of State as Foreign Terrorist Organizations.

The charges in this case mark the first time that associates of Al Qaeda have been charged with narco-terrorism offenses. Issa, Touré and Abelrahman were arrested in Ghana on Dec. 16, 2009, at the request of the United States; thereafter, they were transferred to the custody of the United States and transported to the Southern District of New York. The defendants are expected to be presented in Manhattan federal court later today before U.S. Magistrate Judge James C. Francis IV.

According to the complaint unsealed today in Manhattan federal court:

Al Qaeda And AQIM

Founded in 1989, Al Qaeda is a terrorist organization which has as its principal goal to attack the United States. Al Qaeda functions on its own and through various terrorist organizations that operate under it. The group now known as AQIM -- formerly the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) -- was founded in the late 1990s with the assistance of Usama Bin Laden. On Sept. 11, 2006, Ayman Al Zawahiri, a high-ranking Al Qaeda member and close associate of Bin Laden, announced that GSPC had joined Al Qaeda and called for "our brothers of the GSPC to hit the foundations of the Crusader alliance, primarily their old leader the infidel United States."

The FARC

From 1964 until the present, the FARC has been an international terrorist group dedicated to the violent overthrow of the democratically elected Government of Colombia. The FARC is highly structured and organized as a military group. To further its goals, the FARC actively engages in narcotics trafficking as a financing mechanism and has evolved into the world's largest supplier of cocaine. For at least the past five years, the FARC has directed violent acts against U.S. persons and commercial and property interests in foreign jurisdictions, including in Colombia. The FARC leadership has directed the kidnapping and murder of U.S. citizens and attacks on U.S. interests in order to dissuade the United States from continuing its efforts to disrupt the FARC's cocaine manufacturing and trafficking activities.

The Narco-Terrorism And Material Support Conspiracies

Between September 2009 and December 2009, Issa, Touré and Abelrahman, who stated that they were associated with Al Qaeda, conspired to assist purported representatives of the FARC in transporting hundreds of kilograms of cocaine from West Africa through North Africa and ultimately into Spain. In a series of telephone calls and meetings with two confidential sources working with the DEA who claimed to represent the FARC (the CSs), the defendants stated that they had a transportation route from West Africa through North Africa, and that Al Qaeda could provide protection for the cocaine along that route.

At an initial meeting with one of the DEA confidential sources (CS-1), Issa stated that his boss, Touré, could facilitate this cocaine transportation. At a subsequent meeting, ISSA introduced CS-1 to Touré, describing him as a leader of a criminal organization that worked with Al Qaeda-affiliated groups in North Africa.

During meetings with the CSs, Touré described his strong relationship with Al Qaeda groups that controlled areas of North Africa, and discussed other instances in which he had transported drugs with Al Qaeda's assistance. Touré stated that Al Qaeda would protect the FARC's cocaine shipment from Mali through North Africa and into Morocco en route to Spain. More specifically, Touré discussed the option of two different transportation routes: one through Algeria and Libya, and the other through

Algeria and Morocco. Touré also discussed the possibility of kidnapping foreign nationals to raise money for the cause.

Touré later agreed to introduce CS-1 to a representative of the group that would handle the security of the cocaine while it was being transported. The CSs subsequently met with Touré and Abelrahman, who was introduced as a leader of a “militia” of armed men. Abelrahman discussed with the CSs the shared goals of the FARC and Abelrahman’s organization, including the fact that they were committed to the same anti-American cause.

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The defendants each are charged with one count of narco-terrorism conspiracy, which carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 20 years and a maximum sentence of life in prison, and one count of conspiring to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization, which carries a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison.

“Today’s allegations reflect the emergence of a worrisome alliance between Al Qaeda and transnational narcotics traffickers. As terrorists diversify into drugs, however, they provide us with more opportunities to incapacitate them and cut off the funding for future acts of terror,” said U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara. “We will continue to work with our partners at the DEA, in Ghana, and around the world to meet the threat narco-terrorism poses to our national security.”

“Today’s arrests are further proof of the direct link between dangerous terrorist organizations, including Al Qaeda, and international drug trafficking that fuels their violent activities,” said DEA Acting Administrator Michele M. Leonhart. “These narco-terrorists do not respect borders and do not care who they harm with their drug trafficking conspiracies. Working with our narcotics law enforcement partners in Ghana and across the globe, DEA is making unprecedented progress in dismantling illicit drug networks in western Africa and around the world, and putting the criminals who operate them behind bars, where they belong.”

The charges unsealed today were the result of the coordinated efforts of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York and the DEA’s Special Operations Division and Ghana Office. Mr. Bharara praised the outstanding investigative work of the DEA and thanked the Department of Justice’s Office of International Affairs, its National Security Division, and the Department of State for their assistance. Mr. Bharara also thanked the Government of Ghana for its cooperation.

Assistant United States Attorneys Jeffrey A. Brown and Christian R. Everdell are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the complaint are merely accusations and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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