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50-2017
For Immediate Release
June 13, 2017

**21 MEN INDICTED IN MASSIVE CIGARETTE SMUGGLING SCHEME
AFTER INVESTIGATION BY BRONX DA, NYPD, NYS TAX DEPT.,
HOMELAND SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS
Nearly 10,000 Cartons Seized, Alleged Tax Fraud is \$20 Million
Cheap Cigarettes Sold in Stores Citywide, Undercutting Law-Abiding Merchants**

District Attorney Darcel D. Clark, New York City Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill, and New York State Department of Taxation and Finance Acting Commissioner Nonie Manion today announced that a joint investigation has resulted in two indictments charging 21 men with trafficking hundreds of thousands of cartons of cigarettes from the South to New York City, evading more than \$20 million in taxes and reaping millions of dollars in proceeds.

District Attorney Clark said, "This criminal enterprise not only allegedly cheated the state and city out of taxes, but undercuts mom-and-pop stores that serve our neighborhoods. Law-abiding businesses cannot compete with stores illegally selling untaxed, cheap cigarettes down the block. We want to extinguish this type of criminal activity, and we will pursue nearly \$17 million in profits from the defendants."

Commissioner O'Neill said, "Unraveling this fraud, both the smuggling of untaxed cigarettes and where the proceeds travel, is important to keeping our City safe. Thank you to the NYPD's Intelligence Bureau detectives and our partners whose work resulted in today's charges."

Acting Commissioner Nonie said, "Joining forces with our law enforcement partners, the Cigarette Strike Force helped take down this massive tobacco smuggling ring, part of our relentless effort to stop the flow of illegal cigarettes into New York. Those dealing in contraband cigarettes are stuffing their pockets at the expense of their local communities. We'll continue to work diligently to see that these criminals face justice."

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Homeland Security Investigations New York Special Agent in Charge, Angel M. Melendez said, “The alleged criminals in this case tried to circumvent New York state and city taxes by trafficking in cigarettes from other states for sale here. They later laundered those proceeds using local businesses as part of their scheme. It is because of law enforcement partnerships and through joint investigations that we were able to locate and arrest the players in this criminal organization and bring them to justice.”

District Attorney Clark said 13 of the defendants have been arrested since June 8, 2017 throughout the Bronx, Westchester and New Jersey; 12 of whom have been arraigned before Bronx Supreme Court Justice George Villegas. They are due back in court on July 5, 2017. Others were arrested in Virginia and North Carolina and four remain at large. If convicted of the top count of the indictments, most of the defendants face 8 1/3 to 25 years in prison.

In one indictment, 17 defendants are charged with Enterprise Corruption, and variously charged with first-degree Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument, second, third and fourth-degree Money Laundering, Cigarette and Tobacco Products Tax and fifth-degree Conspiracy.

The second indictment charges four defendants with first and second-degree Criminal Tax Fraud, second, third and fourth-degree Money Laundering, Cigarette and Tobacco Products Tax, fourth-degree Conspiracy.

According to the 15-month investigation, the defendants purchased about 5,000 cartons of cigarettes a week in North Carolina and Virginia for about \$50 per carton (\$5 per pack) and drove them to the Bronx. A carton retails for about \$130 in New York City. The defendants sold them to distributors who then sold them to bodegas and delis, where a pack of cigarettes sold for about \$8 a pack, instead of \$13.

The criminal enterprise included Shareef Moflehi, 30, Omar Jhury, 26, and Hector Rondon, 44. Saleh Ali Qasem, 34, was identified as the lead defendant in the second indictment. Investigators who went to Rondon’s Bronx home to arrest him found a trap door in the floor of his bedroom, leading to a crawlspace in the foundation of the house, where they found Rondon.

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District Attorney Clark also announced that her Office filed two civil forfeiture lawsuits against the defendants. The first is against Shareef Moflehi, et. al for \$15,210,000.00, representing the proceeds of the defendants' cigarette-based money laundering enterprise. Three houses which were used as instrumentalities of the crime or purchased with the illegal proceeds will be seized, including one in Mount Vernon, Westchester County purchased recently by Moflehi for \$675,000 in cash.

The second lawsuit is against Saleh Ali Qasem, et al. for \$1,757,945.00. This sum represents the proceeds of the defendants' cigarette based money laundering operation. Two houses will be seized.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant District Attorneys Edward O. Siclari, Griffin Kenyon , W. Dyer Halpern, Director of the Tax and Organizational Fraud Unit, and Jessica Lupo, Supervisor Trial Bureau 70, under the supervision of Tarek Rahman, Chief of the Special Investigations Bureau, and the overall supervision of Stuart Levy, Deputy Chief of the Investigations Division and Jean T. Walsh, Chief of the Investigations Division.

District Attorney Clark thanked Assistant District Attorneys Mary Jo Blanchard, Counsel to the Investigations Division, and William Zelenka, Chief of the Economic Crimes Bureau for their assistance in this case, as well as Danielle Jackson, and Audrey Manaiza of the Investigations Division, and members of the NYPD DA Squad and Detective Investigators from her Office.

The civil action is being litigated by Assistant District Attorneys Cristina Paquette and Jennifer Shaw of the Asset Forfeiture Unit under the supervision of Lisa Waller, Deputy Chief of the Civil Litigation Bureau.

District Attorney Clark also thanked the NYS Tax Department's Criminal Investigations Division; the NYPD Intelligence Division, particularly Detectives Jonathan Dubroff and Joseph Petrosino, Sergeant Robert Byrne and Lieutenant Joseph Sullivan; Homeland Security Special Agent Abe Jardines, and Lieutenant Henry King of the Rocky Mount, NC Police Department.

An indictment is an accusatory instrument and not proof of a defendant's guilt.



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DEFENDANTS

NOMAN ALBAHRI, 36, 1875 Gleason Ave, Bronx
SAMIR HOSIN, 29, 98 Ridgewood Ave, Bronx
OMAR JHURY, 26, 49 N. 10th Ave, Mount Vernon

(MORE)

JAMAL KARKAT, 26, 1735 Hobart Ave, Bronx
TAHIR KASTRATI, 50, 1723 Colden Ave, Bronx
HECTOR RONDON, 44, 826 A Leland Ave, Bronx
SHAREEF MOFLEHI, 30, 121 Stephens Ave, Bronx, & (recently) 369 Westchester Ave, Mount Vernon
PAZAL MOHAMMED (AKA JOHN), 30, 28 Bobwhite Plain, Hicksville, NY
ABRAHAM SHARHAN (AKA IBRAHIM), 34, 4165 Grace Ave, Bronx, 63 Sherwood Ave, Yonkers, NY
YASSER SUFYAN (AKA MALIK), 31, 191 Bennett Ave, Yonkers, NY
AMMAR SHAMAKH, 33, 101 Vincent Drive, Clifton, NJ
NAGIB MOHAMED SHARIF ALI, 39, 3746 Riverside Drive, Raleigh, NC
SHAHER DAHJAT DARI (AKA BOO BOO), 28, 1269 Waterloo Drive, Rocky Mount, NC
MAEEN M. ALSAYIDI, 34, 11 East 2nd Street, Clifton, NJ
OMAR NASSER, 22, 508 Woodswalk Lane, Rocky Mount, NC
ILYAS MAMUN, 47, 3459 Dekalb Ave, Brooklyn, NY
ABDUL WAHED SALIM (AKA AMIGO), 32, 207 Maddux Drive, Pikesville, NC

SALEH ALI QASEM, 34, 1025 Underhill Ave, Bronx
MOHAMED SIDI AMAR, 39, 300 Addison way, Petersburg, VA
YAHY OULD CHEBIH, 36, 29 Craterwoods Court, Petersburg, VA
TAHIR OULD ELY LEMINE, 39, 169 Craterwoods Court, Petersburg, VA

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