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**THREE MEMBERS OF INTERNATIONAL KHAT
TRAFFICKING RING CONVICTED IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that ALI AWAD, ABDI EMIL MOGE, and ABDULLAHI HUSSEIN - three members of an international khat trafficking organization - were convicted late yesterday by a jury in Manhattan federal court, on narcotics charges relating to khat, an African plant containing a controlled substance, cathinone. AWAD and MOGE were convicted of conspiring to import and distribute khat, and HUSSEIN was convicted of conspiring to distribute khat. MOGE was also convicted of conspiring to launder the cash proceeds of khat distribution. A fourth defendant, ABDI NUR DAHIR, was acquitted of narcotics and money laundering charges. According to the evidence at trial:

AWAD and MOGE were among the leaders of an international network which spanned from the Horn of Africa, where khat plants are grown, through Western Europe, to New York City. From New York, the khat plants were distributed throughout the United States and ultimately sold to users in cities

including Minneapolis, Minnesota; Columbus, Ohio; Portland, Maine; Boston, Massachusetts; Washington, D.C.; Seattle, Washington; and Salt Lake City, Utah.

The criminal network imported multiple shipments of khat every week, with an aggregate weight in the tons. The defendants imported khat in express mail packages that were falsely described as containing "documents" or "children's toys," or by using couriers who carried khat into the United States by air, among other methods. The network operated from the early part of 2005 until the coordinated, nationwide arrests of approximately forty members of the organization in July and August 2006. In a post-arrest statement that was introduced at trial, AWAD compared the khat trade to cocaine trafficking, and lamented that khat had devastated Somalia, as well as Somali communities within the United States.

The evidence at trial also showed that MOGE laundered hundreds of thousands of dollars generated from the network's illegal khat sales. MOGE had been involved in the illegal khat trade for at least seven years, predominantly by paying Western European couriers to smuggle suitcases filled with khat on commercial flights from London to the United States. MOGE's illegal business generated hundreds of thousands of dollars in illicit cash, which was laundered through "hawalas" - informal money remitting networks commonly used in parts of Africa and the Middle East. MOGE had no legitimate source of income, but purchased an expensive home, a BMW, and other luxury items, while

sending hundreds of thousands of dollars to his khat suppliers in Europe.

The successful prosecution was the result of a coordinated, nationwide investigation led by the Office's International Narcotics Trafficking Unit, and agents and officers of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, the New York City Police Department, the United States Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation Division, the Department of Homeland Security Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the New York State Police, the United States Marshals Service, the United States Secret Service, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, working together as part of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force. Mr. GARCIA thanked these officers for their outstanding efforts, and acknowledged the critical contributions of the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, and the Nassau County Police Department.

All three defendants face a maximum term of imprisonment of twenty years on each count of conviction. Sentencing is scheduled for October 5, 2007, at 10:00 a.m. before the Honorable DENISE L. COTE, the United States District Judge who presided over the trial.

Assistant United States Attorneys DANIEL L. STEIN,

ANJAN SAHNI, and SEETHA RAMACHANDRAN are in charge of the prosecution.

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