

Dearborn resident pleads guilty to terror charges

Cigarette smuggling generated funds man sent to Hezbollah

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By David Shepardson / *The Detroit News*

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DETROIT -- A Dearborn man pleaded guilty Thursday in U.S. District Court to providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization.

Hassan M. Makki, 41, of Dearborn also pleaded guilty to a racketeering conspiracy charge.

The government said in court that Makki received instructions from sheiks in Iran and Lebanon for carrying out activities in the United States and that Makki said he has sent money to orphans in southern Lebanon.

"The money was intended to support Hezbollah's orphans and martyrs program to benefit the families of those killed in Hezbollah operations or by Hezbollah's enemies," the U.S. attorney's office in Detroit said in a statement.

In some cases, the money sent to Hezbollah was given to orphans of Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel and members of Hezbollah who carried out military operations, the government charged.

Makki acknowledged providing more than \$2,000 to Hezbollah after it had been designated a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department.

In one case, Makki was stopped at the U.S.-Canada border with \$500,000 in undeclared checks and cash. Some of that money was meant for Hezbollah, the government said.

The government said Makki acquired the money through a cigarette smuggling ring that bought more than \$500,000 in cigarettes in North Carolina, where taxes are 50 cents per carton, and illegally sold them in Michigan, where the tax is now \$12.50 per carton. They also bought cigarettes from an Indian reservation in New York, where they are tax-free, and resold them in Michigan.

Makki's lawyer, Marshall Goldberg, said he would not comment on the case until after sentencing.

Makki is the eighth of 11 people charged in the case to plead guilty. Michigan was defrauded out of \$2 million in sales taxes, the government said, but it has not said how much of that it figures was sent to Hezbollah.

Under the plea agreement, Makki faces up to five years and 11 months in prison and a \$250,000 fine when sentenced Dec. 16.

The case has been handled by the U.S. attorney's office's anti-terrorism task force.

Hezbollah, in a statement faxed to The Associated Press in Beirut earlier this year, denied any link to Makki.

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