

Former San Diego Resident Pleads Guilty to Funding ISIS Terrorist Activities in Syria

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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Southern District of California

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – December 17, 2021

SAN DIEGO – Abdullahi Ahmed Abdullahi, a Canadian national and former resident of San Diego, pleaded guilty in federal court today, admitting that he conspired with others to provide material support to terrorists engaged in violent activities such as murder, kidnapping and maiming of persons in Syria.

According to his plea agreement, Abdullahi admitted that he provided money to his four cousins, including an 18-year old Minneapolis resident, as well as former San Diego resident Douglas McAuthur McCain, to support their terrorist activities in Syria.

From November 2013 through March 2014, with financial assistance from Abdullahi for the purchase of airline tickets and subsistence abroad, Douglas and the others traveled from the San Diego and Minneapolis and Edmonton, Canada to Syria, where they joined the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a foreign terrorist organization, and engaged in armed battles to gain control of the territories and civilian populations within Syria on behalf of ISIS. All five individuals were subsequently reportedly killed fighting for ISIS.

Douglas McCain, a former San Diego resident, is the first known American to die fighting for ISIS. He departed from San Diego in March 2014, and on or about August 25, 2014, he was reportedly killed fighting for ISIS against Free Syrian Army forces. Douglas' brother, Marchello McCain, was previously convicted in San Diego federal court and sentenced to 10 years in custody for illegal possession of a cache of firearms and providing false statements to FBI agents regarding his knowledge of the conspiracy, including the involvement of Abdullahi.

Pursuant to the plea agreement, Abdullahi also admitted that in order to finance the travel of others to Syria, members of the conspiracy encouraged Abdullahi and others to steal and commit fraud against the “kuffar” (a pejorative term used to describe non-Muslims), claiming that such criminal activity was permissible under Islamic law.

Abdullahi admitted that on January 9, 2014, he committed an armed robbery of an Edmonton jewelry store for the purpose of raising funds to support terrorist activities in Syria. Thereafter, on three occasions, Abdullahi wired and caused others to wire money to other members of the conspiracy in the United States -- including approximately \$3,100 to Douglas – in order to finance the travel of foreign fighters from North America to support and join terrorist fighters engaged in terrorist activities in Syria.

Additionally, Abdullahi admitted that he and others wired and caused money to be wired to third-party intermediaries in Gaziantep, Turkey (located approximately 40 miles from the Syrian border) for the purpose of supporting member of the conspiracy fighting and engaging in terrorist activity in Syria.

According to the plea agreement, Abdullahi has agreed to a term of imprisonment of 20 years.

“Terrorist networks can’t survive without people like Abdullahi,” said U.S. Attorney Randy Grossman. “Our top priority is protecting Americans from terrorists, and with today’s guilty plea, we have delivered justice to someone who directly funded violence. I want to commend FBI San Diego and all of the federal, state and local law enforcement partners at the San Diego Joint Terrorism Task Force for their hard work and dedication to the multi-year, complex investigation that led to today’s guilty plea. Additionally, I am also extremely grateful for the assistance of the Department of Justice’s Office of International Affairs and our Canadian law enforcement partners, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; Edmonton Police Services; the Alberta Crown Prosecution Service; the Public Prosecution Service of Canada; and the Canada Crown Prosecutor’s Office, all of whom have been instrumental in the United States’ efforts to prosecute Abdullahi and combat international terrorism.”

“The defendant committed violent, criminal acts to obtain money to help fund Douglas McCain’s travel overseas to fight for ISIS, where McCain was ultimately killed,” said FBI Special Agent in Charge Suzanne Turner. “This case demonstrates the FBI’s dedication to vigorously pursue those who provide material support to terrorist organizations, financial or otherwise, and hold them accountable for those conspiratorial actions.”

On September 15, 2017, pursuant to an extradition request by the United States, Canadian authorities arrested Abdullahi. Abdullahi was detained in Canadian custody without bail, pending extradition. On October 24, 2019, Canada extradited Abdullahi to San Diego to face the material support charges in the Indictment.

DEFENDANT

Criminal Case No. 17CR0622-W

Abdullahi Ahmed Abdullahi

Age 33

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Conspiracy to Provide Material Support to Terrorists – Title 18, U.S.C., Sections 2339A(a)

Maximum penalty: Fifteen years in prison and \$250,000 fine (per count)

Providing Material Support to Terrorists – Title 18, U.S.C., Sections 2339A(a)

Maximum penalty: Fifteen years in prison and \$250,000 fine

INVESTIGATING AGENCIES

San Diego Joint Terrorism Task Force

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Federal Air Marshal Service

Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations

Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Border Patrol

Topic(s):

Counterterrorism

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