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**MEMBERS OF INTERNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING AND MONEY
LAUNDERING ORGANIZATION INDICTED**

GREENBELT, Maryland - Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced today that 11 men – five residents of the United States, three residents of Pakistan, two Afghan nationals living in Thailand, and a Canadian – have been indicted for crimes arising from an international heroin trafficking and money laundering operation. The unsealing of the 22-count indictment follows the arrest of nine of the 11 defendants on August 29, 2003, in Bangkok, Thailand; Silver Spring, Maryland; Alexandria, Virginia; and northern California.

The indictment charges all 11 defendants with participating in conspiracies to distribute and import heroin into the United States, and describes transactions involving more than 40 kilograms of heroin. The indictment also includes four heroin distribution charges relating to two deliveries in Beltsville, Maryland; one in Bangkok; and one at Heathrow Airport near London, United Kingdom. In addition, the indictment includes six counts of money laundering and 10 counts of using communications facilities to commit and facilitate drug crimes. The indictment seeks \$50 million in forfeitures.

The indictment alleges an organization in which Muzaffar Khan Afridi, age 68; his son Alamdar Khan Afridi, age 27; and Waiz Ul-Din Wardak, age unknown, all of Pakistan, distributed heroin and received the proceeds of heroin trafficking. Mohammad Khalid Azizi, age 29, and his cousin, Omar Azizi, age 25, both Afghan nationals operating a gem and jewelry business in Bangkok, Thailand, used their gem and jewelry business to promote heroin trafficking, including the exchange of heroin for jewelry and cash. Zalmai Ibrahimi, age 48, of Laurel, Maryland, negotiated numerous deliveries of heroin in Maryland, Thailand and the United Kingdom to a cooperating witness (“the CW”) and provided Pashto-to-English translation during conversations between the Afridis and the CW. Four money launderers – Ahmad S. Akbari, age 35, of Silver Spring, Maryland; Rafiullah Habibi, age 38, of Alexandria, Virginia; Qader Qudus, age 45, of Fremont, California; and Ali Baigzad, age 49, of Union City, California – conducted or aided and abetted “hawala” transactions (in which money is transferred from one country to another without any currency, negotiable instruments or documents being physically or electronically moved) and caused funds to be delivered to the Afridis and Ul-Din to pay for heroin and promote heroin distribution.

The indictment further alleges a series of transactions in which various defendants sold heroin to the CW, or transmitted drug proceeds or advance payments for drugs to the overseas drug dealers. First, Ul-Din and Ibrahimi negotiated a transaction which led to Mohammad Idris, age 70, a resident of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, delivering approximately 1.4 kilograms of heroin on July 20, 2001 in Beltsville. Idris received \$40,000 in U.S. currency as partial payment towards a purchase price of approximately \$160,000 owed to Ul-Din. At Ul-Din’s request and with Ibrahimi’s assistance, numerous payments were then made to Ul-Din, primarily through the “hawala” system.

The payments included Habibi transmitting \$24,000 in July and August 2001 as payments of the outstanding debt from the July 2001 heroin transaction. In October 2001, Akbari accepted \$13,000 to transmit to UI-Din.

The indictment alleges that during late 2001 and early 2002, Khalid Azizi, Omar Azizi, Ibrahimi and UI-Din negotiated with the CW for another heroin transaction that would involve swapping jewelry for heroin. Ibrahimi and the CW traveled to Thailand in November 2001 to discuss heroin distribution with the Azizis and UI-Din. After additional discussions and meetings, on February 26, 2002 in Bangkok, Thailand, UI-Din delivered approximately 1.85 kilograms of heroin intended for distribution in the United States to the CW and an undercover law enforcement agent, and received jewelry and \$9,000 in cash.

The indictment alleges that during the summer of 2002, the Afridis discussed additional heroin transactions with the CW in Maryland. On July 17, 2002, Baigzad accepted jewelry from the CW as consideration for funds to be provided by Qudus to the Afridis. Qudus converted the jewelry to cash and transmitted funds to the Afridis. In Virginia, Habibi accepted more than \$48,000 in cash for payment to the Afridis in Pakistan. As a result of these shipments, on August 14, 2002, in Beltsville, Maryland, Idris delivered approximately 1.9 kilograms of heroin and received \$60,000 in U.S. currency.

The indictment further alleges that during the fall of 2002, the Afridis negotiated larger heroin transactions with Ibrahimi and the CW, including negotiations held during meetings in Dubai, United Arab Emirates in September and November 2002. At the latter meeting the Afridis accepted \$140,000 from the CW as a down payment for a shipment of approximately 20 kilograms of heroin, and transferred approximately \$40,000 from Dubai to Muzaffar Afridi's account in Pakistan via a

“hawala” money transmitter. The Afridis made arrangements to transmit heroin in a shipment of goods from Peshawar City, Pakistan to Heathrow Airport, London, United Kingdom. On January 16, 2003 the Afridis caused approximately 19.2 kilograms of heroin intended for distribution in the United States to be delivered to Heathrow Airport on a Qatar Airways flight. The heroin was seized by British Customs. The Afridis also sent a facsimile transmission to the CW which included a diagram identifying the location of 120 packages of heroin within the container they had caused to be shipped to Heathrow Airport, and called to verify that the heroin shipped to Heathrow had been received. In the wake of this shipment, Habibi accepted approximately \$5,000 in cash for payment to the Afridis. In addition, on March 21, 2003, the Afridis caused another shipment of approximately 18 kilograms of heroin to be delivered to Heathrow Airport on a Qatar Airways flight.

The Afridis, Ul-Din, Khalid Azizi and Ibrahimi were arrested in Bangkok on August 29, 2003 and are in Thai custody awaiting extradition to the United States. Omar Azizi is being sought by Thai authorities and Idris is being sought by Canadian authorities. Also arrested on August 29 were: Akbari at his Silver Spring, Maryland residence; Habibi at his Virginia residence; and Qudus and Baigzad in the San Francisco Bay area. Akbari has been temporarily detained pending further hearings on possible release conditions. Habibi has been temporarily detained pending a detention hearing in Greenbelt tomorrow. Qudus and Baigzad were temporarily detained by a U.S. Magistrate Judge in Oakland, California who later set pretrial release conditions, including substantial bond and electronic monitoring. Baigzad was released. However, U.S. District Judge Alexander Williams, Jr. in Greenbelt who has been assigned the case revoked Qudus’s bond pending a hearing to be held after Qudus is transported in custody to Maryland.

All 11 defendants are charged with heroin distribution and importation conspiracy, and face a maximum penalty of life imprisonment, a \$4,000,000 fine and at least five years of supervised release. The indictment also includes money laundering charges against the Afridis, Habibi, Ul-Din, Akbari, Qudus and Baigzad for which the maximum penalty is 20 years imprisonment, a \$500,000 fine and five years supervised release. The indictment further charges the Afridis, Ibrahim, Ul-Din and the Azizis with using a communications facility to commit a drug offense for which the maximum penalty is four years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine and three years supervised release. No arraignment dates have been scheduled.

An indictment is not a finding of guilt. An individual charged by indictment is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty at some later criminal proceedings.

The criminal charges in this indictment are the result of a joint investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the United States Attorney's Office. The investigation was conducted under the auspices of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) and received support from the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Stuart A. Berman and Barbara S. Skalla.