U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

News Release

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HAYWARD MAN ADMITS RUNNING ILLEGAL FUNDS TRANSFER BUSINESS THAT MOVED NEARLY $1 MILLION TO AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN, AND ELSEWHERE

OAKLAND – A Hayward man faces up to five years in prison after pleading guilty today to federal charges that he ran an unlicensed money transfer business out of a neighborhood pizza parlor and funneled nearly $1 million to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere.

Noor Alocozy, 41, who owns Noor Transfer Money, was charged with one count of operating an unlicensed money transfer business and, pursuant to a plea agreement, pleaded guilty to this charge.

According to the plea agreement, Alocozy admitted that between July 12, 2002, through October 31, 2003, he owned and operated Noor Transfer Money and transferred nearly $1 million on behalf of individuals in the United States to individuals located in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere. He admitted he operated Noor Transfer Money without a license from either the California Department of Financial Institutions or the United States Department of Treasury, in violation of federal law.

The charge against Alocozy is the culmination of a two-year, multi-agency investigation led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that also involved the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division. Alocozy is scheduled to be sentenced August 26.

"This case demonstrates the real threat posed by unlicensed money transmittal businesses. Any criminal or terrorist can come to these underground businesses and have millions wired anywhere in the world with no questions asked," said Charles DeMore, special agent-in-charge of ICE investigations in San Francisco. "ICE's goal is to identify, disrupt and ultimately dismantle these underground financing and transmittal operations."

Alocozy is the second person charged in the Northern District of California this month with operating an illegal money transmitting business. Last week, ICE agents arrested Eltaib Yousif, 41, at his residence in Castro Valley, California. Yousif, who made his initial court appearance May 13, is charged with one count of operating an unlicensed money transmitting business. According to the indictment, Yousif illegally transferred more than $1.5 million outside the country between September 2001 and November 2003. The investigation began after San Francisco ICE agents received a tip from the High Intensity Financial Crime Area Task Force in New York about suspicious deposits being made into accounts at several Citibank branches there and in the Bay Area.

The charges filed against Alocozy and Yousif are just the latest enforcement action in ICE's nationwide crackdown on unlicensed money transmittal businesses. The USA Patriot Act of 2001 enhanced ICE's ability to combat the international movement of funds through unlicensed money services businesses and so-called "hawalas" by enhancing the 18 USC 1960 statute. All these businesses are now required to be registered with the federal government and licensed by state authorities.

Since the enactment of the USA Patriot Act through April 15, 2005, ICE has initiated more than 280 investigations into unlicensed money services businesses and executed more than 100 search warrants in connection with these cases. During this time period, ICE investigations into unlicensed money service businesses have resulted in roughly 140 arrests, 138 indictments, and the seizure of some $25.5 million.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.