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**MANHATTAN U.S. ATTORNEY ANNOUNCES MAJOR LAW
ENFORCEMENT ACTION TAKEN AGAINST SYNTHETIC
CANNABINOID MANUFACTURERS AND DISTRIBUTORS, INCLUDING
CRIMINAL CHARGES AGAINST TEN MEMBERS OF AN
INTERNATIONAL TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION, AS WELL AS
COORDINATED SEARCHES, SEIZURES AND INSPECTIONS**

Preet Bharara, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York; William J. Bratton, Commissioner of the New York Police Department ("NYPD"); James J. Hunt, Special Agent in Charge of the New York Field Division of the Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"); Glenn Sorge, Acting Special Agent in Charge Homeland Security Investigations ("HSI") New York; Robert E. Perez, Director of the New York Field Office of Customs and Border Protection ("CBP"); and Joseph Fucito, Sheriff of the City of New York, announced today the unsealing of an Indictment against ten defendants involved in a massive drug distribution ring involving smokable synthetic cannabinoids ("SSC"). The scheme, which operated in all five boroughs of New York City, allegedly involved the unlawful importation of at least 100 kilograms of illegal synthetic compounds, an amount sufficient to produce approximately 1,300 kilograms of dried SSC product, or approximately 260,000 SSC retail packets. Coordinated with the unsealing of these criminal charges were searches of five processing facilities and warehouses used to process, store, and distribute SSC, as well as inspections of over 80 stores and bodegas around New York City.

Six of the defendants were arrested last night in connection with today's charges. Those defendants will be presented in Manhattan federal court before U.S. Magistrate Judge Sarah Netburn later this afternoon. MOHAMED ALMATHEEL, HAMID MOSHREF, ABDULLAH DEIBAN, AND FARIS NASSER KASSIM have not yet been arrested.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara said: “Today, we launch an aggressive assault on a public health crisis that is reaching epidemic proportions: the scourge of dangerous new drugs that are killing people and sending thousands upon thousands to emergency rooms in New York City and around the country. Despite sometimes being called synthetic marijuana, this is not marijuana – it can have unpredictably severe and even lethal effects. What is more, use of these drugs aggravates all manner of other societal ills: it is entering prisons; preying on the homeless; burdening our hospitals and emergency rooms; fueling addiction; exacerbating mental health problems; and increasing risks to cops who must deal with people high on this poison. Synthetic cannabinoids are a deadly serious problem that demands an equally serious response. Today’s collective action is just the start of that response, one that will not end until this poison in a packet no longer endangers our community.”

NYPD Commissioner William Bratton said: “This is a scourge on our society, affecting the most disadvantaged neighborhoods and our most challenged citizens. It affects teenagers in public housing, homeless in the city shelter system, and it’s quite literally flooding our streets. This is marketed as synthetic marijuana, some call it K2. It is sold by the names of Galaxy, Diamond, Rush, and Matrix. But its real name is poison.”

DEA Special Agent in Charge James J. Hunt said: “There is a misconception that synthetic cannabinoids, known on the street as ‘synthetic marijuana,’ ‘K2,’ and ‘spice,’ are safe. Synthetic cannabinoids are anything but safe. They are a toxic cocktail of lethal chemicals created in China and then disguised as plant material here in New York City. Today’s arrests represent law enforcement’s efforts to combat this emerging public threat. By investigating and arresting manufacturers and distributors of ‘spice’ in the city, we have cut off the accessibility for those feeding the beast.”

HSI Acting Special Agent in Charge Glenn Sorge said: “Synthetic marijuana is rapidly becoming a huge problem in our communities. It is cheap and dangerous, especially for our teens and young adults. We are working side by side with our law enforcement partners both here and abroad to combat the sale of this hazardous alternative to marijuana.”

CBP Director Robert Perez said: “Today’s actions are a textbook example of the positive results that come with interagency collaboration among the law enforcement community. The expertise of our CBP Officers, specifically their targeting and analysis capabilities, resulted in a major investigation involving multiple agencies at all levels of government; the arrest of six individuals, and the takedown of a significant drug trafficking organization.”

Sheriff Joseph Fucito said: “The Sheriff’s Office stands ready with our partners in law enforcement in addressing the sudden proliferation of synthetic drugs sales in licensed retail locations throughout New York City. Owners and operators of licensed locations have an obligation to keep illegal and highly dangerous substances out of the hands of our children. The Sheriff’s Office is committed to agency partnerships and enforcement strategies that advance this goal.”

The following allegations are based on the unsealed Indictment, and other documents filed today in Manhattan federal court¹:

¹ As the introductory phrase signifies, the entirety of the text of the Indictment and the description of the Indictment set forth herein constitute only allegations, and every fact described should be treated as an allegation.

This scheme involves the unlawful importation, manufacture, and distribution of massive quantities of smokable synthetic cannabinoids (“SSC”), containing controlled substances, throughout the New York City area and elsewhere. ABDULLAH DEIBAN, FARIS NASSER KASSIM, MORAD NASSER KASSIM, a/k/a “BK,” NAGEAB SAEED, WALIDE SAEED, MOHOMED SAEED, HAMID MOSHREF, MOHAMED SALEM, MOHAMED ALMATHEEL, and FIKRI NAGI, the defendants, were members of an international organization that trafficked, manufactured, and distributed SSC (the “Organization”).

DEIBAN, FARIS NASSER KASSIM, and MORAD NASSER KASSIM arranged the importation of illegal synthetic compounds in powdered form from China to the United States via commercial delivery services. After the chemical compounds arrived in the United States, DEIBAN, FARIS NASSER KASSIM, and MORAD NASSER KASSIM then arranged for them to be retrieved and transported to a processing facility, where they directed other co-conspirators to mix the illegal synthetic compounds with chemical solvents including acetone and/or flavoring additives and to spray the resulting liquid mixture onto tea leaves. DEIBAN, FARIS NASSER KASSIM, and MORAD NASSER KASSIM also organized and supervised the processing facility located on Light Street in the Bronx, New York, where co-conspirators acting under their direction bundled the resulting dried SSC product into retail packets bearing colorful logos and brand names and arranged for the transfer of bulk quantities of the SSC retail packets to warehouses controlled by wholesale distributors. The SSC retail packets were sold under names such as “AK-47,” “Blue Caution,” “Green Giant,” “Geeked Up,” “Psycho,” “Red Eye,” and “Black Extreme,” each containing between approximately three and six grams of product, and sometimes marked “not for human consumption,” or “potpourri.” The illegal SSC retail packets were sold to individual customers for approximately \$5 per packet.

NAGEAB SAEED, WALIDE SAEED, and MOHOMED SAEED were among the Organization’s wholesale distributors. NAGEAB SAEED, WALIDE SAEED, and MOHOMED SAEED were responsible for coordinating the distribution of the retail SSC packets to more than 70 retail locations located within the five boroughs of New York City. NAGEAB SAEED, WALIDE SAEED, and MOHOMED SAEED purchased bulk quantities of retail SSC packets from the Organization’s manufacturers, prepared them for delivery, and organized their distribution to retail sellers by directing the Organization’s transporters.

AMID MOSHREF, MOHAMED SALEM, and MOHAMED ALMATHEEL were among the Organization’s transporters. MOSHREF, SALEM, and ALMATHEEL were responsible for moving bulk quantities of SSC retail packets from warehouses controlled by NAGEAB SAEED, WALIDE SAEED, and MOHOMED SAEED to retail sellers throughout New York City. FIKRI NAGI, the defendant, was one of the Organization’s retail sellers. NAGI ordered large quantities of SSC retail packets from NAGEAB SAEED, WALIDE SAEED, and MOHOMED SAEED for resale at retail locations.

Between September 2014 and September 2015, the Organization imported at least 100 kilograms of illegal synthetic compounds, an amount sufficient to produce approximately 1,300 kilograms of dried SSC product, or approximately 260,000 SSC retail packets.

SSC are widely accessible because they are inexpensive and commonly sold at otherwise legitimate retail locations. The colorful logos used on the SSC retail packets and the flavors used, such as lime, strawberry, and blueberry, make SSC attractive to teenagers and young adults. Physical effects of SSC include agitation, rapid heart rate, confusion, dizziness, nausea and vomiting, paranoia, panic attacks, and acute kidney injury. In addition, SSC products have inconsistent potencies, often containing more than one synthetic compound, and are sometimes laced with other toxic chemicals. In a recent two-month period, use of SSC resulted in 2,300

emergency room visits in New York State. Nationally, calls to poison centers in the United States related to synthetic cannabinoid use between January and May 2015 increased 229% over the same period in 2014.

* * *

Charts identifying each defendant, the charges, and the maximum penalties are attached to this release. The statutory maximum penalties are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendants will be determined by the judge. The case is assigned to U.S. District Judge Thomas Griesa.

U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara thanked the DEA, the NYPD, HSI, CBP, and the Office of the Sheriff of the City of New York for their work in the year-long investigation, which he noted is ongoing. The DEA's New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force also played an important role in today's enforcement actions. The Strike Force is comprised of agents and officers of the DEA, NYPD, HSI, the New York State Police, the U. S. Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Marshals Service, New York National Guard, the New York Department of Taxation and Finance, the Rockland County Sheriff's Office, the Clarkstown Police Department, Port Washington Police Department and New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision.

The case is being prosecuted by the Office's Narcotics Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Negar Tekeei, Alexander Rossmiller, Katherine Reilly, and Max Nicholas are in charge of the prosecution. Assistant U.S. Attorney Niketh Velamoor of the Office's Money Laundering and Asset Forfeiture Unit is responsible for the forfeiture of assets.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

U.S. v. Deiban, et al.

COUNT	CHARGE	DEFENDANTS	MAXIMUM PENALTIES
1	Conspiracy to Distribute Narcotics (21 U.S.C. § 846)	ABDULLAH DEIBAN, FARIS NASSER KASSIM, MORAD NASSER KASSIM a/k/a "BK," NAGEAB SAEED, WALIDE SAEED, MOHOMED SAEED, HAMID MOSHREF, MOHAMED SALEM, MOHAMED ALMATHEEL, and FIKRI NAGI	20 years in prison

Defendants' Ages and Residencies

DEFENDANT	RESIDENCE	AGE
1. Murad Nasser Kassim		29
2. Nageab Saeed		26
3. Walide Saeed		30
4. Mohamed Saeed		31
5. Mohamed Abdullah Salem		47
6. Fikri Yahwa Nagi		31
7. Abdullah Deiban		35
8. Faris Nasser Kassim		32
9. Mohamed Almatheel		Unknown
10. Hamid Moshref		Unknown