

US to indict leaders of Islamic charity

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The US government has filed an indictment against a US charity and its leaders, charging that it supplies money to Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza. It has also charged that the defendants are guilty of money-laundering and other monetary infractions and should forfeit more than \$12m. in funds or properties.

The indictment, filed last week in the US District Court in Dallas, was the second legal action lodged in the US during the past month aimed at international funding operations on behalf of Hamas and other terrorist groups.

On July 2, the relatives of five US terror victims sued The Arab Bank. They accused it of supporting the families of Islamic Jihad and other terrorists by funneling money to them from the Saudi Committee in support of the Intifada Al Quds and other alleged charities established to popularize the terrorist organizations.

Earlier this week, Mark Werbner, the trial lawyer in the Arab Bank complaint, told *The Jerusalem Post* that the aim of the litigation is to “strike a major blow at terrorist financing. Our focus is the payments made to suicide bombers and other terrorists engaged in violence against civilians. We must attack the logistical and the financial infrastructure supporting terrorism as aggressively as we attack the bombers themselves.”

The US government indictment is aimed at the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLF) and some of its top executives, including Shukri Abu Bakr, Mohammed El-Mezain, and Ghassan Elashi. The HLF was established in 1988 at about the same time as Hamas. The organization was allegedly involved with a network of Moslem Brotherhood organizations and sponsored conventions, seminars and rallies meant to advance Islamic fundamentalism and anti-Israeli activity.

After the Oslo Accords were signed in September 1993, the heads of HLF and other Hamas activists in the US met in Philadelphia to decide how to undermine the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and conceal their activities on behalf of Hamas.

In the other action, Werbner accused The Arab Bank of playing a crucial role in the “comprehensive insurance scheme” which Hamas offers suicide and other terrorists and their families by giving them monthly subsidies. The Amman-based Arab Bank has branches throughout the West Bank and Gaza as well as New York.

The HLF collects money in Saudi Arabia and transfers it to the Madison Avenue branch of The Arab Bank, where the Saudi currency is converted into dollars. From there it is transferred to the 15 bank branches in the West Bank and Gaza and deposited in the accounts of the terrorists or their families in accordance with a “wage scale” depending on the terrorist act committed and the injury to the terrorist.

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Werbner believes that the complaint against The Arab Bank is unique because “it is a commercial, public, international and multi-billion dollar bank.” Therefore, the plaintiffs stand a chance not only of winning their case, but also obtaining financial recovery. Most of the lawsuits in Israel and the US until now have been aimed at the Palestinian Authority, the Iranian government or the terrorist groups that perpetrated the attacks. Even when they have won their lawsuits most of the plaintiffs have not received any money so far.

One of the reasons Hamas has made use of The Arab Bank is because it has branches scattered all over the territories. This means that recipients of the disbursements can get hold of their money relatively easily. Werbner showed *The Jerusalem Post* a photocopy of an advertisement listing the names of hundreds of “families of martyrs” and urging them to pick up their stipends at their local Arab Bank branch.

Werbner said The Arab Bank claims it does not know what the money deposited by the HLF is for but that it will not be difficult to disprove this claim. “We have credible evidence from many sources,” he said. “A lot of the evidence comes from the bank itself.”