

California Man Behind Anti-Islam Film Freed From Federal Custody

The man behind an anti-Islam film that stoked angry protests against the United States across the Muslim world was released from federal custody in California on Thursday after serving time for probation violations stemming from his role in making the video.

Mark Basseley Youssef, a 56-year-old, Egyptian-born Coptic Christian who was paroled from a 2010 bank fraud conviction before producing the now-notorious film clip, was sent back to prison last November for failing to abide by the terms of his supervised release.

He admitted in court at the time to committing several probation violations, including the use of aliases and accessing the Internet, in the course of producing the video, which portrayed the Prophet Mohammad as a fool and a sexual deviant.

The crudely made 13-minute film, circulated online under several titles including *The Innocence of Muslims*, touched off a torrent of anti-American demonstrations in Arab and Muslim countries, where many consider any depiction of the Prophet as blasphemous.

The start of the unrest on Sept. 11, 2012, coincided with an attack on U.S. diplomatic posts in the Libyan city of Benghazi that killed four Americans, including the U.S. ambassador to Libya. Links between the Benghazi assault and Youssef's film have since been debunked.

On Thursday, Youssef walked out of an undisclosed Los Angeles-area halfway house a free man after completing a 12-month

sentence, federal Bureau of Prisons spokesman Ed Ross said. Youssef's term was reduced by about six weeks for time he already had served in jail following his arrest.

He began his latest incarceration with two months at the federal detention center in Los Angeles, then served about four months at a federal prison in La Tuna, Texas, before being transferred to the halfway house in late May.

Youssef, a former gasoline station owner identified in some public records by his birth name, Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, will remain under the supervision of probation officials for the next four years, bureau officials said.

Federal prosecutors insisted that his arrest last September had nothing to do with the content of the film he made but rather with his breach of probation rules while making it, including the use of assumed names in a production that other participants said was fraught with deception.

Some American cast members said after the video came to light that they had been duped into appearing in a film they were led to believe was an adventure drama called "Desert Warrior," and that they had since been subject to death threats.

Youssef said in a *New York Times* interview last November that he made the film to reveal what he called "the actual truth" about the Prophet Mohammad and to raise awareness of violence committed "under the sign of Allah."

But in a CNN interview last month, Youssef said he "never thought my movie can cause anyone trouble or anyone can get killed from my movie."

(Editing by Cynthia Johnston, Peter Cooney and Leslie Adler)

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