

Muslim Who Plotted Church Attacks Faces 10 Years in Prison

One of two New York men charged last year with plotting to blow up synagogues and churches in Manhattan pleaded guilty on Tuesday and faces a decade in prison.

Ahmed Ferhani, 27, admitted to conspiring to attack the biggest synagogue in Manhattan as well as churches to send a message of violence to non-Muslims. Ferhani, who was arrested in May 2011, entered the plea in New York State Supreme Court.

Justice Michael Obus said he intends to sentence Ferhani to 10 years in prison. The judge said that after his sentence, Ferhani, an Algerian immigrant who lived in the borough of Queens, may be deported to Algeria.

Ferhani's plea is the first conviction in New York under a state terror statute enacted in 2001 after the Sept. 11th attacks and one of only two cases Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance has brought since the statute was enacted.

As part of his plea, Ferhani told the judge that he conspired with another man, Mohamed Mamdouh, and the undercover New York police detective to "develop a plan to attack and damage a synagogue in New York County or elsewhere in New York City using explosives."

"By targeting a synagogue, which I knew to be a Jewish house of worship, in this manner, I intended to create chaos and send a message of intimidation and coercion to the Jewish population of New York City, warning them to stop mistreating Muslims," Ferhani told the judge.

Ferhani and Mamdouh were arrested after they purchased three

guns, ammunition and what they believed was a live grenade. Police have said the two discussed growing beards and curls to disguise themselves as Hasidic Jews before planting explosives in synagogues.

Ferhani appeared in court without Mamdouh.

Aaron Mysliwiec, the lawyer representing Mamdouh, declined to comment on Ferhani's plea, saying only that Mamdouh's case is still pending

Police officials have said the men have no known ties to terror organizations, with the police commissioner calling the pair "lone wolves" after their arrest.

At Tuesday's court appearance, prosecutors read for the first time from transcripts of Ferhani discussing his plans with an undercover detective two days before his arrest, after purchasing what he believed to be a live grenade.

"Imagine the ruckus and chaos," Ferhani said, according to the transcripts."

Defense attorneys have argued that the Ferhani has emotional and mental issues that authorities were aware of before he became the subject of the undercover investigation and eventual sting operation.

Ferhani "has been getting institutionalized since he was 17 years old," defense attorney Lamis Deek said after the court proceeding. "The NYPD was called to his house more than a dozen times. They would show up at his house and then take him to Bellevue" hospital.

Obus, the judge overseeing the case, said in court he had "no problem" with the way the investigation was conducted.

District Attorney Vance said in a statement released after the plea that the threat of another attack on New York "is real, and terrorism requires us to be constantly on alert."

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