

Would-Be US ISIS Recruit Sentenced to 30 Years Behind Bars

A would-be Islamic State recruit from California was sentenced on Monday to 30 years in prison for his conviction on charges he sought to join the militant group in Syria and committed bank fraud to pay for a plane ticket there, federal prosecutors said.

Nader Elhuzayel, 25, was found guilty in June by a U.S. District Court jury in Santa Ana, California, of conspiring and attempting to provide material support, namely himself, to a terrorist organization, and 26 counts of bank fraud.

He became the first person tried, convicted and sentenced for such charges in federal court, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Los Angeles said. More than 70 individuals have been charged in the United States with trying to travel abroad to enlist with Islamic State, with most cases resulting in guilty pleas.

A native-born U.S. citizen, Elhuzayel worked various odd jobs after graduating from high school, took a course in medical billing and attended community college for several semesters, according to a pre-sentencing memorandum.

Elhuzayel was arrested on May 21, 2015, when he tried to board a Turkish Airlines plane at Los Angeles International Airport for a flight to Turkey, from where he had planned to make his way to the Syrian border, federal prosecutors said.

Found in his carry-on bag was a computer storage drive containing graphic photos of Islamic State beheadings and a "hit list" of U.S. Defense Department employee names and addresses compiled by the extremist group, according to evidence presented at trial.

Weeks earlier, prosecutors said, Elhuzayel had posted Twitter messages professing support for a 2015 incident in Texas in which two gunmen attacked an exhibit of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad and were shot to death by police.

Elhuzayel also appeared in a video swearing allegiance to Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and pledging to enlist as a fighter in the militant group, which has seized swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria and claimed responsibility for numerous attacks on civilians in Europe.

Prosecutors said Elhuzayel and a co-defendant, Muhanad Badawi, repeatedly used social media to express their support for Islamic State, including its execution of gay men. One Twitter message posted by Elhuzayel declared: "The only thing more beautiful than rain is homosexuals being thrown off tall buildings."

Badawi was convicted in a joint trial with Elhuzayel of conspiring with him to support terrorism, aiding and abetting his efforts by purchasing his one-way plane ticket, and a single count of financial aid fraud in connection with the plot.

He is scheduled to be sentenced on Oct. 17, and faces up to 15 years in prison for each count relating to providing support for terrorism. {eo}

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