

ICE deports former Cleveland imam who lied to gain U.S. citizenship

DETROIT — U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deported a former Cleveland imam to the Palestinian Territories yesterday after he was convicted by a federal jury of lying about his involvement with a designated terrorist organization.

Fawaz Damrah, 46, previously the imam of Ohio's largest mosque, raised money in the early 1990s for the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), which has been designated by the U.S. government as a foreign terrorist organization. ICE started removal proceedings against Damrah after the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Ohio successfully prosecuted Damrah for lying on his naturalization application by not disclosing his affiliation with the terrorist organization.

Immigration Judge Marsha Nettles subsequently ordered Damrah removed from the United States for providing material support to a terrorist organization.

The PIJ has carried out a long campaign of terror through suicide bombings and assassinations. In February 1990, the PIJ attacked a tour bus in Egypt, killing 11 people, including nine Israelis. The PIJ has also threatened Western interests and targeted U.S. officials for assassination. In recent weeks, the PIJ has fired rockets into Israel despite an official cease-fire in Gaza.

Evidence presented during Damrah's criminal trial showed that he exploited the PIJ's terrorist attacks during fundraising activities for the organization. On videotape shown in court of a 1991 fundraising event, Damrah is seen explaining that, "...whoever donates... it is as if he too is fighting the holy war, and he will be rewarded like him, even if he stays home." During other fundraising events Damrah said, "terrorism and terrorism alone is the path to liberation."

The immigration prosecution was handled by ICE's Office of the Chief Counsel in Detroit. The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Ohio and the Cleveland FBI office provided substantial aid in Damrah's prosecution.

ICE