

DISTRICT ATTORNEY – NEW YORK COUNTY

NEWS RELEASE
February 26, 2008

CONTACT: Barbara Thompson
212-335-9400

Manhattan District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau announced today the indictment of two leaders of an organization called the “Committee on Contract Compliance” on racketeering and extortion charges.

The defendants are ANTHONY LEWIS (aka JAMIL, aka FUSS) and KYLE CORRELL (aka IBRAHIM ABDUL HAQQ).

The investigation leading to today’s charges revealed that the defendants used an organization -- the Committee on Contract Compliance—as a mechanism to extort money from building contractors throughout the City by threatening to report fake violations at job sites. Many of the contractors victimized were members of minority groups or were immigrants, primarily from Asia or the Middle East.

The investigation revealed that the defendants and other members of their organization visited construction job sites wearing hardhats with the lettering “Committee on Contract Compliance.” The defendants, carrying clipboards and video cameras, made it appear that they worked for a government agency. They threatened to report contractors to regulatory agencies unless the contractors paid them. If the contractors refused to pay, reports of false violations and hazards were reported to New York City agencies, including the Department of Buildings, the Police Department, the Fire Department, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Environmental Protection, and federal agencies, such as the Occupational Safety and Health Agency and Housing and Urban Development.

While in some cases, inspectors may have encountered legitimate violations, most times they did not, and the unnecessary site inspections interrupted and delayed construction projects, costing contractors considerable money and time. After the agencies left the construction sites, the defendants would reappear and again demand payments, which the contractors, in general, now paid. It was less expensive to pay the extortion than it was to incur the delays, fines and sanctions brought on by the defendants’ reports.

For example:

- The defendants went to another contractor’s job site in Queens. The defendants told the contractor that they could make his safety issues go away for \$50,000. When he refused to pay, the defendants notified the bank which had supplied \$15,000,000 financing for his project and claimed that the contractor had safety violations. The bank began to make inquiries about the so-called violations. The contractor solved his “problem” by meeting LEWIS and paying him \$1000.

- Another contractor was building on waterfront property he owned in Queens. The defendants told him that he had violations at his job site. The contractor/owner, having faced years of delays in his efforts to develop his property, “hired” the defendants. He paid them \$10,000 in the seven months he worked on his building and had no further problems from the defendants.
- A contractor was followed by defendants to various jobs in Brooklyn and Queens and paid them \$5000 to ensure that the defendants stopped making demands and harassing him.
- The defendants approached a contractor at a job site in Manhattan and claimed there were safety violations on his job. When he refused to pay, the site was visited by real inspectors who issued violations. When the defendants next visited, the contractor agreed to pay them. He paid them \$2000 over a period of two months and, in return, the defendants stopped harassing him.
- The defendants told another contractor in Queens that he had \$8000 worth of violations at his job site and demanded that he pay them \$4000. The contractor refused and resulting inspections by various agencies caused a two-month delay in the contractor’s completion timetable.
- At a work site in Queens, the defendants told a contractor that there were many violations that they would overlook in exchange for money. The contractor refused. CORRELL used LEWIS’ cell phone and began to call the Department of Buildings. When the contractor realized what was happening, he offered them \$300, and CORRELL ended the cell phone call.

In addition to the inconvenience and increased costs to contractors caused by the defendants, hundreds of fake complaints were lodged with various city and federal agencies. For example, the defendants lodged numerous complaints with the Fire Department. When the complaint alleged safety violations, the Fire Department had to dispatch a fire truck, with a full complement of firefighters, to visit the locations. This, of course, made fire trucks unavailable in the event of a real emergency.

The defendants, however, were not always successful in their extortions.

One Friday evening, the defendants forced a company erecting a large sign atop a building on 125th Street in Manhattan to stop working because of alleged safety violations. The work stoppage left the unsecured sign swaying in the wind, creating an actual safety hazard. The owner of the company was called and he told the defendants he would “take care” of them on Monday if they would just let his workers finish working. On Monday, the company’s owner refused to pay the defendants, told them to deal with the Building Department and to leave him alone.

Mr. Morgenthau said, “Instead of using violence as a weapon to extort against minority contractors, these defendants abused government process by threatening or lodging fake complaints with City and Federal agencies. The agencies had no choice but to respond, and played into the hands of the defendants.”

New York City Department of Investigation Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, "DOI was pleased to work with the Manhattan District Attorney's Office on this investigation, which uncovered allegations of extortion by these individuals who were part of a minority labor coalition. These charges are all the more serious because in some cases these individuals presented themselves as working under the guise of a semi-official capacity indicating to contractors that they were there to ensure safety and streamline the City regulatory practices. In actuality, as these allegations show, these individuals were only concerned about their own profit. Those who choose to engage in this type of criminal conduct should know that they will be caught and prosecuted."

This indictment is the result of continuing investigations by the District Attorney's Labor Racketeering Unit-Construction Industry Strike Force into criminal activities in New York City's construction industry and grew out of the District Attorney's current efforts to combat corrupt labor coalitions. The investigation has involved hundreds of hours of surveillance, undercover operations and the execution of search warrants.

Those previously charged in connection with this ongoing investigation include the September 2006 indictments of Derrick Walker; Frederick Rasberry; and their coalition, Akbar's Community Services; Reginald Rabb; Steven Mason; and their coalition, P & D Construction Workers. Walker pleaded guilty to Enterprise Corruption and was sentenced to 4 to 12 years in prison in April, 2007. Rasberry also pleaded guilty to Enterprise Corruption and will be sentenced later this year. Rabb pleaded guilty to Enterprise Corruption and was sentenced to 8 ½ to 17 years in state prison in November 2007, Mason also pleaded guilty to Enterprise Corruption and was sentenced to 7 ½ to 15 years in state prison in November of 2007.

In October of 2007, Jerome Robertson and Keith Williamson were both charged with Grand Larceny in the Second Degree by Extortion in connection with their operation of their coalition called Family Construction. Those charges are pending.

In November of 2007, Kaison Sanders, Franz Xavier and Craig Franklin of the Solo Coalition were indicted for Enterprise Corruption and extortion. Those charges are pending.

LEWIS AND CORRELL were both charged with Enterprise Corruption, and four counts of Grand Larceny in the Fourth Degree and one count of Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree for their operation of the Committee on Contract Compliance. Enterprise Corruption is a class B felony which is punishable by up to 25 years in state prison. Grand Larceny in the Fourth Degree and Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree are class E felonies which is punishable by up to 4 years in prison.

This investigation was conducted for the Manhattan District Attorney's Office by Assistant District Attorneys Thomas Mooney, Elizabeth Lederer and Diana Florence, under the supervision of Labor Racketeering Unit Chief Michael Scotto. District Attorney's Investigators Salvatore Novellino, Frank Pappalardi, and Terrence Quinn

participated in the investigation under the supervision of Joseph Pennisi and Terence Mulderrig, Chief and Deputy Chief of the District Attorney's Investigations Bureau.

Mr. Morgenthau thanked the New York City Department of Investigation, Commissioner, Rose Gill Hearn, Inspector General, New York City Department of Buildings, Special Investigations Unit; New York City Department of Buildings and its Commissioner Patricia Lancaster; Chief Inspector Joseph Polcha, Field Public Communication Unit, Bureau of Fire Prevention, New York City Fire Department; Scott Raccina, Director of Operations, 311, New York City Department of Information, Technology and Telecommunications; Richard Mendelson, Manhattan Area Director, Occupational Safety and Health Administration; Gordon S. Hedell, Inspector General and Steven Perez, Special Agent in Charge, Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations, United States Department of Labor- Office of the Inspector General, New York Region.

Defendants' Information:

Anthony Lewis, 4/25/69
1570 East New York Avenue
Brooklyn, New York

Kyle Correll, 9/27/67
51-23 Beach Channel Drive
Far Rockaway, NY

###