

News Release

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Erin Mulvey

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Jury Finds Attorney's Guilty of Witness Tampering and Possession of Illegal Eavesdropping Equipment
Two Defendants Face Up to Life in Prison

AUG 20 -- John P. Gilbride, the Special Agent-In-Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's New York Field Division ("DEA") and Benton J. Campbell, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, announced that following a four-week trial a federal jury in Brooklyn today returned verdicts in which they found criminal defense attorneys Robert Simels and Arienne Irving guilty of conspiracy to obstruct justice through witness tampering, attempted witness tampering, and importation and possession of illegal eavesdropping equipment. Simels was also convicted of bribing a witness. When sentenced by United States District Judge John Gleeson, both defendants will face a maximum sentence of life in prison.

DEA Special Agent in Charge John P. Gilbride stated, "It is imperative that the public's trust in our system of justice is not undermined. Our system of justice must be free of corruption at every level and this conviction proves that the public will not tolerate those who twist the system for their own benefit. Be it drug traffickers or those who assist in their illegal enterprise."

The evidence at trial established that Simels, and his associate, Irving, schemed to obstruct justice and tamper with witnesses in connection with the representation of drug king pin Shaheed Khan in federal court in Brooklyn. The defendants sought to use their client's Guyana based criminal organization in an effort to identify, locate, and tamper with individuals they believed would be government witnesses at Khan's criminal trial. To this end, the defendants met with a cooperating witness ("CW") -- a former member of Khan's criminal organization -- and discussed with him a range of options, including bribing the witnesses and acts of violence against them and their family members to prevent the witnesses from testifying against Khan. When the defendants were arrested at their Manhattan offices in September 2008, law enforcement found electronic equipment designed to secretly intercept and record cellular telephone calls. The equipment was imported by the defendants from Guyana where it had been used by Khan to target individuals, some of whom were later murdered.

"The defendants' crimes were an affront to the criminal justice system," stated United States Attorney Campbell. "This case demonstrates that those who seek to use their license to practice law as license to commit crimes will be brought to justice." Mr. Campbell expressed his grateful appreciation to the Drug Enforcement Administration, Group D-32 for their assistance during the investigation and trial.

The government's case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Steven L. D'Alessandro, Daniel D. Brownell, and Morris J. Fodeman.

The Defendants:

Name: ROBERT SIMELS

Age: 62

Name: ARIENNE IRVING

Age: 31