

Former BenU student arrested for attempting to join ISIS

By: Karly Sacco and Sara Haque

Former Benedictine University student, Mohammed Hamzah Khan, was arrested Saturday afternoon at O'Hare International Airport for allegedly attempting to travel overseas to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), according to a press release by the United States Attorney's Office.

"The University is shocked and saddened that this former student would be so involved," stated Benedictine President Dr. William Carroll in an email to the BenU community.

Khan appeared at the U.S. District Court on Monday with "one count of attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization," according to a press release from the United States Attorney's Office.

Khan will remain in federal custody and his next court hearing is on Thursday at 10:30 a.m. at the U.S. District Court in Chicago.

Khan was a freshman at BenU during the 2013-2014 academic year. During his time on campus, he made an impression on some current students.

"He is a nice and pious kid. He goes to the [mosque], he's obedient to his parents, he's a solid kid, smart in school, always ahead of his class...he is just an overall good kid," said a BenU student who asked to remain anonymous.

The news of this arrest affected many people on campus.

"The Muslim Student Association of Benedictine University unconditionally condemns the alleged actions of the individual in question. His actions and intentions are not a representation of the principles of the Muslim Student Association (MSA), the Islamic faith, or any student in general," according to a statement from the student leaders of MSA.

"We love, respect, and adhere to the noble values of our institution, and we are just as, if not more, hurt and shocked by his betrayal of community and the community as a whole."

Investigators are trying to piece together Khan's motives.

Khan allegedly told investigators that he had met someone online who provided him a phone number that he was to call once he arrived in Istanbul, Turkey. The contact was to take Khan to where ISIS was based. When asked where he would be going, Khan stated somewhere in Syria or Iraq, according to the U.S. District Court.

Authorities obtained a search warrant to Khan's residence, where they found a "handwritten, 3-page letter, which appears to have been written by Khan and left for his parents to explain his October 4, 2014 travel."

In his letter, Khan stated, "FIRST and FOREMOST, PLEASE MAKE SURE TO NOT TELL THE AUTHORITIES For if this were to happen it will jeopardize not only the safety of us but our family as well."

"My dear parents, there are a number of reasons I will be going to the blessed land of Shaam, and leaving my home," according to the letter obtained by authorities. "We are all witnesses to the western societies are getting more immoral day by day."

"I extend an invitation to my family to join me in the Islamic State."

Other evidence included a list of materials he purchased, a map of his travel plans and a calendar with drawings supporting ISIS, according to the United States District Court.

Upon investigation of his car, authorities found several items including "the ISIL (ISIS) flag and the flag of another designated foreign terrorist organization," according to the United States District Court.

Khan was taken into custody by members of the Chicago FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force while going through a security checkpoint, according to the press release. The press release also stated that the possible penalty of this charge could be 15 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000.

Therese Porod contributed to this story.

LINK U.S. District Court Criminal Complaint:

http://www.justice.gov/usao/iln/pr/chicago/2014/pr1006_01a.pdf