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INTERSTATE GUN TRAFFICKING RING DISMANTLED

*Investigation Nets More Than 100 Guns, Including Assault Weapons
Three Defendants Charged with Smuggling Firearms Via 'Iron Pipeline;' Face Up to 25 Years in Prison*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced today that three defendants were indicted on the heels of a seven-month investigation into gun trafficking that included a series of undercover buys in the parking lot of a P.C. Richard & Son in Astoria and a wiretap on the defendants' phones. The investigation netted 109 illegal firearms and rifles smuggled from the Midwest via the notorious Iron Pipeline, including 20 assault weapons, as well as 139 high-capacity magazines and hundreds of rounds of ammunition.

District Attorney Katz said: "We are fighting the gun plague with all our might and resources, on the streets and in the courts. Through the hard work and collaboration of police and prosecutors, we have seen shootings in 2023 decline 28 percent in the city and 34 percent in Queens. That is of little comfort, however, to the more than 1,000 victims of shootings across the city this year. Through investigations, arrests and prosecutions, we will continue to do everything we can to shut the Iron Pipeline down once and for all."

"When that day comes," District Attorney Katz added, "all of us will owe a debt of gratitude to the brave undercover officer in this dangerous investigation, and to all those who have risked their lives to help keep us safe."

NYPD Commissioner Edward A. Caban said: "This case underscores some disturbing truths: First, Illegal guns proliferate and circulate in many neighborhoods that still need our help. And second, every day the men and women of the NYPD perform incredibly dangerous work to prevent these firearms from getting into criminals' hands. Every illegal gun taken off the street, every robbery that is avoided, every shooting that does not occur, and every homicide that never comes to pass, is another realization of the public safety promise we have vowed to fulfill. I commend and thank the NYPD undercover officer who successfully worked this case, our detectives, and our partners in the Queens District Attorney's Office, for their dedication to this critical investigation."

Defendants Ahmed "Taju" Mutalib, Abdul Haruna, and Murtala Haruna – who are all cousins – were indicted by a grand jury on 575 counts charging them with criminal sale of a firearm, criminal possession of a weapon, conspiracy and money laundering. **(See Addendum).**

They each face up to 25 years in prison and are due back in court on November 9.

According to the charges:

- Police were alerted to the trafficking activity through a confidential tip to District Attorney Katz's office and the NYPD in March 2023.
- Following an initial investigation and intelligence gathering, five transactions took place between the defendants and an undercover police officer in the parking lot of P.C. Richard & Son, at 35-18 Steinway Street in Astoria.
- On June 10, Mutalib sold 12 guns with respective unloaded magazines, in addition to 10 large-capacity magazines. Abdul Haruna was present during the transaction and counted the money.
- On June 27, Mutalib sold 16 semi-automatic pistols with respective unloaded magazines, three rifles, one shotgun, and 900 rounds of 9 mm ammunition.
- On August 8, Abdul Haruna collected \$4,000 in pre-recorded money from an undercover officer as an upfront payment towards the purchase of additional firearms.
- On August 14, Mutalib sold five rifles, 25 semi-automatic pistols with respective unloaded magazines and 20 large-capacity magazines.
- On August 26, Mutalib and Murtala Haruna sold five long guns, 30 semi-automatic pistols and 500 rounds of 9 mm ammunition.

In all, the undercover officer bought a total of 97 firearms, including 17 assault weapons.

During the course of the investigation, called Operation Chainline, the defendants were recorded discussing the purchase, transport and sale of multiple firearms. Detectives witnessed defendants Murtala Haruna and Mutalib coming out of a Cincinnati townhouse carrying large boxes to a U-Haul truck, corresponding directly with subsequent calls regarding the transportation of guns for sale.

On September 8, law enforcement officials tracked Murtala Haruna and Mutalib driving a rented vehicle with a Florida license plate through New Jersey into New York. When the defendants parked in Staten Island, a search warrant was executed on the vehicle, resulting in the arrest of the two defendants and the recovery of:

- 12 guns, including three assault weapons
- 13 high-capacity magazines
- 1,000 rounds of 9 mm ammunition
- Two sets of men's clothing
- Backpack with financial documentation in Mutalib's name

Defendant Abdul Haruna was arrested pursuant to the indictment on November 2.

The joint investigation was conducted by the Violent Criminal Enterprise Bureau of the Queens County District Attorney's Office, along with New York City Police Department Detective Alejandro Valderrama, with the assistance of Captain Jeffrey Heilig, Lieutenant Daniel Nicoletti, Detective Shaneil Mitchell, and Police Officer Masawudu Yakubu, all of the NYPD's Firearms Suppression Section, under the supervision of NYPD Assistant Chief Jason Savino.

Assistant District Attorney Genevieve Gadaleta of the District Attorney’s Violent Criminal Enterprises Bureau is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Jonathan Sennett, Bureau Chief, Michelle Goldstein, Senior Deputy Bureau Chief, Philip Anderson and Barry Frankenstein, Deputy Chiefs, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney of Investigations Gerard Brave.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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ADDENDUM

AHMED “TAJU” MUTALIB, 32, of Decatur, Georgia, is charged with five counts of criminal sale of a firearm in the first degree, four counts of criminal possession of a weapon in the first degree, money laundering in the second degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree, and other crimes. If convicted, Mutalib faces up to 25 years in prison.

ABDUL HARUNA, 27, of the Bronx, New York, is charged with three counts of criminal sale of a firearm in the first degree, two counts of criminal possession of a weapon in the first degree, money laundering in the second degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree, and other crimes. If convicted, Haruna faces up to 25 years in prison.

MURTALA HARUNA, 30, of Cincinnati, Ohio, is charged with two counts of criminal sale of a firearm in the first degree, criminal possession of a weapon in the first degree, money laundering in the second degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree, and other crimes. If convicted, Haruna faces up to 25 years in prison.

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Note to Editors: Archived press releases are available at www.queensda.org.

