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## **Killers Freed Early in Case That Exposed Iran's Involvement in Int'l Terror**

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(CNSNews.com) - The German government has freed and deported two men serving life in prison for the 1992 killing of Kurdish dissidents in Berlin. Their release comes 10 years after a trial that sparked a diplomatic furor over claims that Iran's top leadership was behind terrorism on European soil.

Iranian national Kazen Darabi and Lebanese co-conspirator Abbas Rhayel served just 15 years, including the time they spent in custody before their marathon trial ended in 1997.

Wire services quoted German officials Monday as confirming that they had been released and deported. Under German law, life sentences are reviewed after 15 years.

On Sept. 17, 1992, two armed men entered a Berlin restaurant called the Mykonos and gunned down Sadiq Sarafkindi, the general-secretary of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), and three associates.

Darabi, who was identified as an agent of the Iranian intelligence ministry and a veteran of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), was the Berlin-based facilitator of the operation.

Rhayel, a member of the Iranian-sponsored Hizballah terror group, was found during the trial to have been one of the assassins. Two other Lebanese men were convicted of being accessories and sentenced to 11 years' and five years' imprisonment, and a fifth man, also Lebanese, was acquitted. Three other men involved in the attack -- including the second gunman -- were believed to have fled the country, and remain at large.

The three-and-a-half-year trial ended with presiding Judge Frithjof Kubsch concluding that "Iran's political leadership ordered the crime."

He said the assassination had been ordered by a secretive Iranian body called the Special Affairs Committee. Although Kubsch did not name them in the judgment, the committee's members included spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the then President Hashemi Rafsanjani, Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, and Intelligence Minister Ali Fallahijan.

The trial verdict caused relations between Iran and Germany -- Tehran's largest Western trading partner -- ebb to their lowest point in years.

Tehran denied any complicity in the killings, and charged that the German justice system

was acting "under the influence of the Zionists."

To protest of the Iranian government's involvement, Germany withdrew its ambassador from Tehran, as did its fellow European Union member-states. When the envoys planned to return, Iran refused to allow the German ambassador back, and the E.U. then urged its members to suspend their ambassadors' return until the Iranians backed down.

The early release of Darabi and Rhyael came despite an earlier appeal by the Israeli government for Germany not to free them yet. Israelis have hoped that Iran may in exchange for their release provide information on the fate of an Israeli air force navigator who went missing over Lebanon 21 years ago. Ron Arad's family believes he is alive and being held by the Iranians.

#### **4 Arrest warrants**

The Mykonos killings were not the first in which Iranian dissidents were targeted abroad. Among many others, Sarafkindi's predecessor as head of the PDKI, Abdol-Rahman Ghassemlou, was assassinated together with another PDKI official in Vienna in 1989.

Kavem Rajavi of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, a former Iranian ambassador to the U.N., was shot dead in Switzerland in 1990.

According to the U.S.-based Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, which earlier this year released a detailed report on the Mykonos case, the killings were "designed to intimidate and disrupt the activities of political opponents of the regime."

The Iranian regime may have wanted its opponents to know who was behind the killings, the center said in the report.

It noted that the terrorists "made little attempt to disguise the origins of the operation or mislead investigators. No attempt was made to remove the serial numbers from the weapons used in the attack nor was any serious attempt made to dispose of them so that they could not be traced back to Iran."

Fallahijan, the former Intelligence Minister, is the subject of several arrest warrants for alleged involvement in international terrorism, including a 1996 German warrant for the Mykonos case; a Swiss warrant issued in 2006 for the Rajavi assassination; and a 2006 Argentinean warrant for the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires which cost 85 lives (Rafsanjani and Velayati were also named in the Argentinean warrant.).

Last month, Interpol placed Fallahijan on its most-wanted list over the Argentinean bombing. The move drew a defiant response and fresh accusations of a Zionist conspiracy by the Iranian, who currently serves as top security advisor to Khamenei and is a member of the Assembly of Experts, a body of 85 clerics chaired by Rafsanjani.

In a Dec. 2006 ruling, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia found that Iran was responsible for the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, and named Fallahijan as having approved and supported the attack. Nineteen U.S. servicemen were killed in the bombing.

Iran has topped the State Department's annual list of terror-sponsoring nations for more than a decade. The U.S. last October imposed sanctions on the IRGC and other entities to punish Tehran for its support of terrorism and its controversial nuclear activities.

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