

PRESS RELEASE

High Level Member of ISIS Sentenced to Life in Prison for Material Support to a Foreign Terrorist Organization Resulting in Death

Friday, July 14, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York

Former Brooklyn and Bronx Resident Convicted of Being an ISIS Fighter, Weapons Supplier, Propagandist, and Recruiter

Earlier today, Mirsad Kandic was sentenced by United States District Judge Nicholas G. Garaufis to [life imprisonment](#) following his May 2022 trial conviction on one count of conspiracy to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), and five substantive counts of providing material support to ISIS in the forms of personnel, including himself, Australian citizen Jake Bilardi, and others, as well as services, weapons, property, and equipment, and false documentation and identification, all between January 2013 and June 2017, when the defendant was arrested in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. [Kandic was convicted by a federal jury in May 2022 following a three-week trial in federal court in Brooklyn.](#)

Breon Peace, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, Matthew G. Olsen, Assistant Attorney General of the Justice Department's National Security Division, Christie M. Curtis, Acting Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI), Ivan J. Arvelo, Special Agent-in-Charge, Homeland Security Investigations, New York (HSI), Edward A. Caban, Acting Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD), announced the sentence.

"Kandic was a high-ranking member of ISIS who relished the death and destruction he wrought while providing every conceivable form of material support to a terrorist organization, including the recruitment of countless others to ISIS's bloody campaigns in Syria and elsewhere," stated United States Attorney Peace. "Today's sentence holds the defendant accountable for his conduct and ensures that he will never again pose a threat to the United States or any of our allies. This Office will remain relentless in prosecuting terrorists who threaten the safety and security of the United States and U.S. interests around the world."

"Let this sentence affirm that HSI will not abide any individual or organization that threatens the national security of the United States," said HSI New York Special Agent in Charge Ivan J. Arvelo. "Mirsad Kandic's steadfast physical and material support of ISIS brought untold additional members into the organization, sowing death and destruction throughout ISIS territory and the world. This investigation and successful prosecution were only possible through the close collaboration of U.S. and international partners working together to track down those who provide support to foreign terrorist organizations and bring them to justice."

As proven at trial, Kandic had multiple responsibilities within ISIS, including recruiting foreign fighters, trafficking foreign fighters from the West through Turkey and into Syria, and obtaining weapons, military equipment, maps, money, and false identifications for ISIS fighters. In carrying out these responsibilities, Kandic worked directly with ISIS emirs and battlefield commanders, including Bajro Ikanovic, who commanded an ISIS training camp in Syria beginning in or around 2014. Ikanovic, in turn, reported to Omar Shishani, then the top military commander for ISIS, and a key advisor to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, at the time the leader of ISIS and the self-declared Caliph of the Islamic State.

After several failed attempts to travel from the United States to Istanbul, Turkey, Kandic took a two-day Greyhound bus ride from New York City to Monterrey, Mexico, in November 2013, and flew through Panama, Brazil, Portugal, Germany, Kosovo, and Turkey before arriving in Syria at the end of 2013. Once in Syria, the defendant joined ISIS and became a fighter for the group in Haritan, an ISIS stronghold in the outskirts of Aleppo, wielding Russian-made PK machine guns and AK-47 assault rifles.

ISIS leadership then sent the defendant to Turkey to take up the role of smuggling foreign fighters and weapons into Syria from abroad, and to serve as an emir for ISIS media. Kandic disseminated ISIS recruitment messages and gruesome propaganda using more than 120 Twitter accounts. For example, the defendant sent out an ISIS-produced "documentary" titled the "Flames of War." This video celebrated ISIS atrocities and macabre executions of ISIS captives, including instances where victims were forced

to dig their own graves before being summarily executed by gunshot. The defendant tweeted that this video was the “best thing ever seen on screen.”

Kandic was a prolific recruiter of foreign fighters for ISIS. He sent thousands of radicalized ISIS volunteer fighters from Western countries into ISIS-controlled territories in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East. This included a fellow New Yorker, Ruslan Maratovich Asainov, who became an ISIS sniper and sniper trainer, and another individual who became an emir for ISIS safehouses in the Idlib province of Syria. Asainov was convicted after trial in February 2023 of conspiracy to provide material support to ISIS, two substantive counts of providing material support to ISIS, one count of receiving military-type training from ISIS, and obstruction of justice. He is awaiting sentencing.

A foreign fighter recruited by the defendant was Jake Bilardi of Australia. Bilardi contacted the defendant in June 2014 for assistance in traveling to Syria to join ISIS. Kandic provided Bilardi—who had just turned 18 years old and had never traveled internationally before—with instructions and guidance for reaching Istanbul, Turkey. Kandic then arranged for Bilardi to be picked up at the airport in Istanbul and smuggled him into Syria. Kandic maintained contact with Bilardi as he became an ISIS fighter and ISIS suicide bomber. Bilardi went on to commit a suicide truck attack with fellow ISIS members on March 11, 2015, in Ramadi Iraq, killing himself, more than 30 Iraqi soldiers, and an Iraqi policeman. Prior to the attack, the defendant wished Bilardi well and stated, “May Allah make there [sic] inner organs implode.” Bilardi’s attack was coordinated with others committed at the same time; 30 members of the Iraqi military were killed, 61 were injured, and 25 were missing, whose bodies were never found, all as a result of this coordinated series of attacks. After the attack, the defendant celebrated Bilardi’s service to ISIS, on Twitter and to a co-conspirator. A member of the Iraqi Army general staff testified at trial that the March 11, 2015 attack paved the way for ISIS’s takeover of Ramadi and the Anbar Province of Iraq several weeks later.

Kandic also provided battlefield intelligence to top ISIS leadership, such as Ikanovic. He also shaped the information environment in which ISIS operated by enforcing ISIS media and publicity discipline. For example, the defendant directed other ISIS supporters to refrain from posting any information about the success (or failure) of ISIS recruitment efforts as well as to minimize any reporting about ISIS military action in specific military actions. Kandic managed money for ISIS fighters in Syria, including two ISIS fighters who gave the defendant their bank cards, from which bank records showed more than \$40,000 was transacted. Kandic smuggled weapons to ISIS in Syria, including a night vision scope for an ISIS sniper. Kandic operated a private market via Telegram—called “Khilafah (Caliphate) Market”—for which he was the group administrator with authority to restrict access to the group. Members posted firearms and military

equipment for sale, including mortars and suicide belts, i.e., improvised explosive devices. Among the members of Kandic's private Telegram market was Abu Luqman, who, at the time, was the ISIS governor for the Raqqa province, ISIS's de facto capital in Syria.

The government's case is being handled by the Office's National Security and Cybercrime Section. Assistant United States Attorneys Saritha Komatireddy and J. Matthew Haggans are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance from Paralegal Specialist Huda Abouchaer, and Trial Attorney Jennifer Levy of the Counterterrorism Section of the National Security Division of the Department of Justice.

The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs, the FBI's Legal Attachés abroad, and foreign authorities in multiple countries on three continents provided critical assistance in this case. The Office extends its appreciation to the Bosnian State Investigation and Protection Agency, the Bosnian State Intelligence and Security Agency, the Bosnian Foreigner's Affairs Service, the Bosnian State Prosecutor's Office, the Australian Federal Police, the Victoria Police (Australia), the Australian Border Force, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Attorney-General's Department, the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, Joint Operations Command in Iraq, and the FBI Legal Attaché Offices in Sarajevo, Canberra, Nur-Sultan, and Baghdad, for their extraordinary assistance in the investigation and prosecution. The Office also thanks the Ministry of Justice for the Republic of Finland, the Stuttgart Police Department and Federal Office of Justice in the Federal Republic of Germany, the Department of Justice & Constitutional Development in the Republic of South Africa, and the central authorities responsible for mutual legal assistance in Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Ukraine; and the FBI's Legal Attaché Offices in those countries for their assistance in the investigation.

The Defendant:

MIRSAD KANDIC

Age: 41

Brooklyn, New York; Kosovo

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 17-CR-449 (NGG)

Related Defendants:

RUSLAN MARATOVICH ASAINOV

Age: 46

Syria and Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 19-CR-402 (NGG)

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Updated July 14, 2023