

U.S. CHARGES 2 AS NEW LEADERS OF COCAINE RING

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Key associates of slain drug lord **Harry Kalasho** have been charged with operating a drug ring that moved 50 to 100 kilograms of cocaine a week into the Detroit area from Florida, federal officials announced Monday.

The men, Issam (Sam the Bull) Hermiz, 26, and Najah Dawood Konja, 30, both of Detroit, are the main witnesses against Raed Jihad, 19, who is charged with murdering Kalasho in March. Kalasho's shooting, law enforcement officials said, may have been in retaliation for killings he allegedly ordered.

Local law enforcement officials have said the testimony of Hermiz and Konja is crucial to the prosecution of Jihad.

"We will have to become very familiar with the federal investigation to determine what impact it may have" on the case, said Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Douglas Baker.

Federal authorities say Hermiz and Konja acted as lieutenants in Kalasho's organization and moved to fill the void after his death. They were arrested Friday, as were Basil Mezy, 26, and Ead Ballo, 33, both of Detroit, and also charged with cocaine distribution. Hector Alvarez, who allegedly supplied the men with cocaine, is being sought by federal authorities.

Federal officials said Hermiz and Konja were arrested Friday afternoon at the Holiday Inn in Dearborn after meeting with undercover FBI and drug agents at the nearby Hyatt Regency Hotel. The agents say they duped the men into believing that a car parked at the Holiday Inn contained 20 kilograms of cocaine the men wanted to buy.

Mezy was arrested a short time later and Ballo turned himself in.

Federal officials said the members of the group began operating in 1987 and traveled frequently to Florida to meet with contacts. They allegedly paid about \$15,000 per kilogram of cocaine.

"They are all significant players and fairly high up" in Kalasho's organization, said Doug Wankel, assistant special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration in Detroit. "We probably haven't seen the last of the arrests in this investigation."

A detention hearing for Mezy, Hermiz and Konja is scheduled Wednesday. Ballo is scheduled to appear today for a hearing.

If convicted, the men face up to life in prison.

CUTLINE

Harry Kalasho

Caption: Photo

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