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EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2007 AT 9 A.M. EDT –

**CHARGES DROPPED IN 20-YEAR OLD DEPORTATION CASE
AGAINST PALESTINIAN ACTIVISTS****Long court battle ends with victory for immigrants**

LOS ANGELES – The 20-year effort to deport two men over their alleged political support of Palestinian self-determination officially came to an end today when the nation’s highest administrative body overseeing immigration cases dismissed all charges against Khader Hamide and Michel Shehadeh, members of a group of Palestinian student activists arrested in January 1987, who became known as the LA8.

The action by the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) closes one of the nation’s longest-running and most controversial deportation cases, one that tested whether immigrants have the same First Amendment rights as citizens.

Hamide and Shehadeh expressed both relief and happiness that the case is finally over but also anger over what they believed to be a politically motivated, baseless prosecution.

“My family and I feel a tremendous amount of relief today,” said Hamide. “After 20 years, the nightmare is finally over. I feel vindicated at long last. This is a victory not only for us, but for the First Amendment of the Constitution and for the rights of all immigrants.”

Shehadeh agreed.

“I am extremely happy but do have mixed emotions,” Shehadeh added. “The government was wrong for twenty one years. They robbed us, and our families, of the best and most productive years of our lives. We are now free to continue living our lives, acting on our beliefs; raising our families, supporting our communities, loving our country, defending justice and the Constitution, and prospering as good citizens.”

The case against the pair began in January, 1987, when the government arrested them and six others, who collectively came to be known as the LA 8, placed them in maximum security prison, and accused them of having ties to a faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The government alleged that Hamide and Shehadeh distributed newspapers, held demonstrations and organized humanitarian aid fundraisers for

Palestinians, and that because these actions supported the PLO faction, they should be deported. The men were initially charged with being associated with a Communist organization, but when a court declared those charges unconstitutional, the government filed new charges of material support for a terrorist group. The case went before the US Court of Appeals four times, the Supreme Court once, and the Board of Immigration Appeals multiple times.

The BIA dismissed the case at the request of the government, which agreed in a settlement to drop all charges and not to seek removal of either of the men in the future based on any of the political activities or associations at issue in the case. Hamide and Shehadeh agreed not to apply for citizenship for three years, and to have several judicial orders in the case vacated as moot.

Attorneys for the two hailed the government's decision to drop the case as a victory the First Amendment rights of all immigrants and a vindication of their clients' actions.

"This is a monumental victory for all immigrants who want to be able to express their political views and support the lawful activities of organizations in their home countries fighting for social or political change," said Marc Van Der Hout, of the National Lawyers Guild. "Hamide and Shehadeh did nothing more than advocate for Palestinians' right to a homeland and support charitable causes and other legal activities in the Occupied Territories. That should never have been cause for deportation charges in the first place. The government's attempt to deport them all these years marks another shameful period in our government's history of targeting certain groups of immigrants for their political beliefs and activities."

"We are overjoyed for our clients, who have spent twenty years fighting for the right to stay in this country and speak and associate freely," said David Cole, a professor at Georgetown University Law School and volunteer attorney for the Center for Constitutional rights. "And we commend the administration for recognizing that federal anti-terrorism resources can be far better spent on other endeavors."

The tipping point came in January 2007, when Immigration Judge Bruce J. Einhorn dismissed the case finding that the government's refusal to turn over evidence favorable to the men violated the pair's right to due process. The government's refusal to comply with his disclosure order, Einhorn wrote, is "a festering wound on the body of respondents and an embarrassment to the rule of law."

The case originally involved seven Palestinians and a Kenyan, the wife of Khader Hamide. Late last year, Aiad Barakat, one of the eight, was sworn in as a U.S. citizen in Los Angeles after federal judge Stephen Wilson rejected the government's contentions that he should be denied citizenship for his political associations. All of the others have either been granted permanent residency or are on track to becoming permanent residents.

"We are gratified that the government has decided to terminate this case and to spend its resources on genuine threats to our national security," said Ahilan T. Arulanantham, staff attorney with the ACLU of Southern California. "Hamide and Shehadeh are law-abiding immigrants who have lived here for more than a quarter century each and done nothing

wrong. We are glad that they will be able to live out the rest of their lives in peace in the country they have called home.”

Van Der Hout and Cole have been representing the immigrants since the case began in 1987 along with Leonard Weinglass of Chicago Seven fame and investigator Phyllis Bennis of the National Lawyers’ Guild.

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