Alleged UN-Hamas Double-Agent Charged

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A senior United Nations engineer in the Gaza Strip was arraigned Thursday in Beersheba District Court on charges that he abused his post in order to aid Hamas, including using the construction of a port as a base of operations for its naval commandos.

After the court confirmed that Wahid Abdullah al-Bursh, 38, from Jabalya understood the charges, Bursh’s attorney, Lea Tsemel, said she would be filing several pretrial motions against them.

Tsemel, a well-known anti-Zionist Jewish attorney, also took the opportunity to allege that her client had collapsed in prison, possibly due to not being given all of his medications.

Bursh was indicted in September, though the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) had arrested him several months earlier, on July 16.

He is an employee of the United Nations Development Program, which undertakes such projects as rehabilitating Gaza Strip homes damaged in warfare. He has worked as a UNDP engineer since 2003 and was tasked with overseeing the demolition of homes and evacuating the resulting waste.

According to the Shin Bet, Bursh was approached shortly after the 2014 Gaza war (Operation Protective Edge) by Husseini Suleiman, a messenger for senior Hamas commander Abu Anas al-Andor, who asked him to use his position to help the terrorist organization.

In April and May 2015, he allegedly helped build the naval commando port in the northern Gaza Strip.

Bursh is said to have used his authority to transfer 300 tons of construction materials to the site. He also is alleged to have convinced his manager at UNDP to give preference to rehabilitation projects in areas where Hamas agents were operating.

The court ordered Tsemel to present a full answer to the charges by October 25, while recognizing that a possible plea deal was being discussed.

UNDP has alternately expressed condemnation of Bursh’s alleged actions while implying that the charges may be inaccurate.

News of Bursh’s indictment came just a few days after Israel made public the arrest of Mohammad El Halabi, the manager of operations in the Gaza Strip for World Vision.

UN agencies such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have provided support to World Vision in the past.

On Wednesday, police arrested a 25-year-old Palestinian resident of Nazareth Illit after he allegedly expressed support for terrorism on his Facebook page. Along with the post were pictures of Palestinian suicide bombers and an image of the suspect holding an M-16 rifle, police said.

The man was originally a resident of the West Bank and gained legal residence in Israel through family reunification.

The Nazareth Magistrate’s Court today extended the suspect’s remand until Sunday.