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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 2008
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LANSING ARSONIST SENTENCED

GRAND RAPIDS, Michigan – Hossam Helmy, 28, an Egyptian national most recently residing in Okemos, Michigan, has been sentenced to four years in prison following his conviction for the arson of his Lansing Township restaurant, U.S. Attorney Charles R. Gross announced today. Helmy pleaded guilty to the charge on August 28, 2007.

On May 15, 2007, Helmy and his brother, Ahmed Helmy, set a fire that destroyed the Lazeez Grill, located at 2820 East Grand River Avenue, Lansing Township, Ingham County, Michigan. The early morning fire was reported by a restaurant employee. The Lansing Township Fire Department responded and firefighters reported observing heavy black smoke pouring from the structure. They were eventually able to extinguish the fire, but not before the restaurant was destroyed. The Lazeez Grill was owned and operated by the Helmy brothers in a building they leased. Shortly before the fire, Hossam Helmy increased the insurance coverage for the restaurant to \$500,000.

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives (ATF) Special Agent and Certified Fire Investigator Mike Marquardt, along with Assistant Fire Marshal Brad Drury of the Lansing Fire Department, and Fire Investigator Todd Hendy of the Lansing Township Fire Department,

conducted a fire scene origin and cause investigation. Based upon that investigation, it was determined that the fire was an intentional act, started within or near a utility room inside the building by using gasoline as an accelerant.

Subsequent investigation implicated the Helmy brothers in purchasing gasoline containers found at the scene. Witness statements also placed both Helmys at the site of the fire just before it began, and Ahmed Helmy was transported to Sparrow Hospital from the scene of the fire with first and second-degree burns to his body. Just after the fire, ATF investigators were able to obtain the clothing the Helmys were wearing, and the Michigan State Police Laboratory confirmed the presence of gasoline. On July 11, 2007, a federal grand jury returned a single-count indictment charging both brothers with the arson. Like his brother, Ahmed Helmy has also pleaded guilty for his role in the arson. He is awaiting sentencing.

In addition to four years in prison, Hossam Helmy was ordered by U.S. District Judge Paul L. Maloney to pay approximately \$350,000.00 in restitution: \$13,875.70 to the Lansing Township Fire Department; \$321,400.00 to the insurance company who insured the building; and \$12,000.00 to the building owner for lost rents.

In commenting upon the sentence, ATF Acting Special Agent-in-Charge William Temple noted that “arson for profit is not a victimless crime. Society as a whole is the victim because arson destroys property and places an ever increasing economic burden upon our communities. It also subjects first-responders to the very real risk of serious injury. ATF’s partnership with the Lansing Police and Fire Departments, the Lansing Township Fire Department, and the Michigan State Police, uncovered the Helmy brother’s insurance fraud scheme, and I am optimistic that the resulting conviction and prison sentence will deter others who may have the same illegal intentions.”

This case was prosecuted on behalf of the United States by Assistant U.S.

Attorney Phillip J. Green.

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