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British Court OKs Suspect's Extradition

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LONDON (AP) - A British court ruled Thursday that a suspected al-Qaida member can be extradited to the United States to stand trial for allegedly plotting to set up a terrorist training camp in Oregon.

The ruling came after the U.S. government reassured the court that the British defendant, Haroon Rashid Aswat, 31, would be tried at a U.S. federal court, not a military tribunal, and that he would not be designated an "enemy combatant." The American government has used that label to detain suspected terrorists at military detention centers such as Guantanamo Bay.

"A trial could be properly and fairly conducted without a breach of the defendant's ... rights," Judge Timothy Workman said in his ruling at Bow Street magistrates court in London.

British Home Secretary Charles Clarke now has up to two months to approve the extradition.

The defense had argued that Aswat should not be extradited to the United States because he would face an "overwhelming risk" of being held in solitary confinement without trial -- cut off from his friends, family and attorneys. Aswat's lawyer, Paul Bowen, immediately appealed.

Aswat was arrested in Lusaka, Zambia, on July 20 in connection with the July 7 bombings in London, in which four suicide bombers killed 52 transit passengers.

Aswat did not comment as he watched the ruling from the back of the courtroom under police guard. He has denied any involvement in terrorism.

Federal prosecutors in New York have charged several men in the alleged conspiracy to set up the terrorist training camp in Oregon with members of a now-defunct Seattle mosque. They include Aswat and Egyptian-born preacher Abu Hamza Al-Masri, also known as Mustafa Kamel Mustafa, who are being detained in England while awaiting possible extradition, and Oussama Kassir, 39, a Lebanese-born Swede recently arrested in the Czech Republic.

Kassir was detained in the Czech capital, Prague, as the United States pursues his extradition.

The U.S. complaint alleges that the men began conspiring in 1999 to establish a training camp in Bly, Ore., that would teach military-style jihad, or holy war, methods so a community of Muslims could move to Afghanistan to fight or to be further trained there. Authorities in Oregon have said the camp never materialized beyond a dozen people taking target practice.

The complaint refers to a letter faxed from one alleged conspirator to another saying the Bly property was in a "pro-militia and firearms state" that "looks just like Afghanistan" and that the group was "stockpiling weapons and ammunition." One of the men from the Dar-us-Salaam mosque in Seattle, James Ujaama, cooperated with U.S. authorities in exchange for a shorter sentence. Ujaama served two years in prison for aiding the Taliban.

Aswat's defense team had argued that the U.S. government's assurance about how Aswat would be prosecuted in America was not legally binding on U.S. President George W. Bush.

The defense also argued that Ujaama had reached a plea bargain agreement with U.S. attorneys after they threatened him with penalties such as solitary confinement and severe limitations on his ability to meet with his lawyers and hold confidential discussions with them.