



# Department of Justice

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## **GEORGIA MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO LYING ABOUT TARGETING POLICE HELICOPTER WITH LASER**

ATLANTA, GA - MOHAMMED HAGHIGHI, 24, of Decatur, Georgia, pled guilty today to charges arising from his targeting of a DeKalb County Police Helicopter with a laser device. In a brief plea hearing before District Court Judge Orinda D. Evans, HAGHIGHI admitted that he lied to agents of the federal Joint Terrorism Task Force when he denied having repeatedly targeted the police aircraft with his laser on the night of February 4, 2007.

“Too many people think it is just a harmless prank when someone shines a laser device at a passing aircraft,” said United States Attorney David E. Nahmias. “This is a dangerous misconception – pilots can be temporarily blinded and tragic accidents can occur. Fortunately, this time no one was hurt. Unfortunately, the problem of ‘lasing’ low-flying aircraft is a growing one. We will continue to do everything we can to protect pilots and passengers traveling through our airspace.”

HAGHIGHI faces up to five years in custody, although a term of probation is also possible for this crime. Sentencing is scheduled for August 22, 2007, at 4:30 p.m. before Judge Evans.

According to Nahmias and the information presented in court: On February 4, 2007, a DeKalb County Police helicopter responded to a night-time call near the Wesley Club Apartments in Decatur. The pilots of the police helicopter were wearing night vision goggles. As the pilots sought out the crime scene, their helicopter was repeatedly targeted by a green laser beam emanating from somewhere in the Wesley Club apartment complex. When the laser beam struck the cockpit, it illuminated the entire cockpit glass and temporarily disoriented the pilots. The pilots eventually spotted an individual standing near a breezeway of the apartment complex. The green laser beam was emanating from something this individual was holding. While the pilots attempted to maintain visual contact with the individual with the laser, the individual continued targeting the helicopter.

The pilots called in DeKalb County Police ground units, who eventually located defendant MOHAMMED HAGHIGHI. These officers also found discarded in a nearby stairwell a hand-held laser with a green laser element. When confronted with this evidence

by the DeKalb County Police, HAGHIGHI claimed ownership of the laser and admitted to having targeted the police helicopter. However, on February 15, 2007, when federal agents from the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force interviewed HAGHIGHI about the helicopter laser incident, HAGHIGHI denied any role in the matter. After being informed that it is a federal crime to lie to federal agents, HAGHIGHI again denied any role in the matter.

This case was investigated by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, with assistance from the DeKalb County Police Department.

Assistant United States Attorney Robert McBurney is prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias, United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at 404-581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is [www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan).