The unjustified blacklisting of Al Barakat

Two decades ago, the US and the UN claimed that Al Barakat was a terror sponsoring organization; this has now been proven false; the question now is whether the US will refund the money confiscated.

By Staff writer

Al Barakat, which in Arabic merely means "blessings," was founded in Somalia in 1985. It then functioned as a different remittance route that many Somalis used. The company was established by businessman and trained banker Ahmed Nur Ali Jimale. Until 1991, when Somalia's civil war broke out, it was conveniently running as a Hawala.

The central government's collapse in Somalia created a barrier, the country's communication infrastructure was destroyed, and the diaspora community struggled to send money home.

Al-Barakat was forced to close its doors as a result, but diasporic Somalis who had fled the civil war were eager to find a way to send money to their impoverished families back home and turned to Ahmed Nur Ali Jimale for assistance

Ahmed Jumale immediately responded by flying in with the remitted funds in a suitcase. The benefactors were tracked using information like the recipients' names and clans.

For Somalis who depend on it for food, shelter, to pay for essential services like health and education, as well as to support their local businesses, this money from abroad has been a lifeline. According to a report from September 11, 2001, Al Barakat was then the largest money remittance system operating in Somalia. In addition to Somalis sending money home, it was also the main method the UN uses to send money to support its relief operations there.

The company had more than 180 offices around the world before the 9/11 attacks on the United States, solidifying its position as a key player in the Somali economy.

Everything changed when Al-Barakat and its affiliates were accused of funding the terrorist organization al-Qaida in 2001, leading to the blacklisting of Al-Barakat and its entities. As a result, the locals were unable to get the money they required to survive.

On November 7, 2001, US Federal agents working through asset forfeiture contractors raided al-Barakaat offices in Minneapolis, Columbus, Ohio, Alexandria, Virginia, Seattle, Washington, and Boston, Massachusetts.

During these raids, they confiscated all of the company's assets, causing millions of Somalis to lose their hard-earned money. In the UAE, $1 million was seized from the UAE EBI accounts, along with all of their records.

All of the company's assets around the world were frozen, and its founder was placed on the American no-fly list as a wanted man. Clients of Albarakat were the hardest hit by the raids.

When informed of the unfortunate circumstances, the company's chairman notes that their clients acted with restraint and understanding. He went on to say that they had to make arrangements to ensure that all of the affected clients were eventually paid, and that this was done with their own money.

Currently, no money is owed by the company, and they have even placed advertisements advising their clients to come for their money. Somalis compare this atrocity to the detonation of two nuclear weapons over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Recognizing that denying millions of Somalis their money was akin to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki disasters.

''Thousands of Somalis had deposits in Al Barakaat,'' said Somalia's ambassador to the United Nations. "Depositors cannot access their funds. Businessmen cannot do business. Many are going bankrupt." He observed. ''We don't want to be seen as defending anyone linked to terrorism. All we want is to see the evidence.'' The ambassador concluded.

The US government claimed to have proof that Al Barakaat had provided up to $25 million to Osama bin Laden. Jumale refutes these allegations, noting that the company's total turnover at the time was less than $25 million. The USA never provided the proof to date.

The United States, through the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Customs Service, launched a two-year investigation into Al Barakaat.

Al-Barakat, for their part, has stated several times that they are open to investigations and scrutiny in order to debunk the allegations leveled against them.

According to the company's top management, when the investigation team from the United States conducted their investigations, they cooperated by handing over all required documents, electronic devices, and every transaction ever done.

Ahmed Nur Ali Jumale now wants the FBI-led investigators to reveal the truth to the world.

After a two-year investigation, FBI agents According to the 9/11 report, the diligent investigation in the UAE yielded no "smoking gun" evidence–either testimonial or documentary–that al-Barakaat was funding AIAI or al Qaeda. "This information is generally not firsthand information or it has not been corroborated by documentary or other circumstantial evidence that supports the allegation."," according to an FBI memorandum.

In 2007, the founder of Al Barakat

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relocated to Djibouti to open a new office, where he met with the president of Djibouti, who welcomed him and advised him to bring business to Djibouti, as well as invite other Somalis to do the same. After learning about Al-situation, Barakat's Djibouti's president launched an effort to delist the company from sanction. The first success occurred in 2009.

Al- Barakat's Swedish branch was successfully removed from the United Nations' list of terrorist organizations in October 2009. The company had been on the list since 2001, and its bank accounts had been frozen.

The UN did not explain why it decided to remove Al- Barakat from its terror list, according to Swedish Public Radio broadcaster SR. However, it has been suggested that the European Union's shift in position regarding the many organizations on the UN terror list, which was based on shaky grounds, may have influenced the UN's position. Al-Barakat was eventually able to regain access to its bank account funds.

All of the Al-Barakat companies were finally cleared on February 17, 2012. The case against the firm was also closed when the UN Security Council al-Qaida Sanctions Committee delisted it.

Mr. Ahmed Nur Jim'ale, owner and CEO of Al-Barakat Group of Companies, and all 17 listed entities associated with Al-Barakat Group of Companies were delisted. Barakat Bank of Somalia, Al-Barakat Exchange, and Barakat Telecommunications Company were among the latter.

As at 30 June 2016, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) completely cleared Mr. Jumale from its listing and this completes the cycle of the delisting process of Al Barakat Group owner from International Sanctioning bodies. Further, on 12th February 2020, OFAC delisted All Barakat related companies as well as the last listed executive from this group of companies Mr. KAHIE, Abdullahi Hussein.

The chairman of Al-Barakat says that he was relieved that the group was finally removed from the US sanctions list, he says normally it is very rare for companies to be removed from those lists saying if they ever get into it.

He observes that this was achieved because the group was innocent and have been subjected to great injustices. Other than the Djbouti government, the successive Somali government has also played a huge role in the removal from the terrorist list.

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What had started off as a criminal case of aiding terrorism was just a mere allegation and suspicion. They destroyed an economy on mere suspicion, killed an established business, rendered many jobless and tarnished the image of a brand that had been built over time.

Will the US publicly apologize and return the money it illegally confiscated?