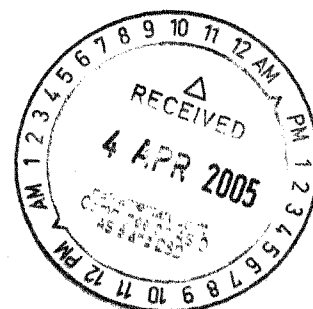




ATTORNEY-GENERAL
THE HON PHILIP RUDDOCK MP



05/2082

23 MAR 2005

The Hon David Jull MP
Committee Chairman
Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS & DSD
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Jull

I am writing to advise you that a regulation is scheduled to be considered by the Federal Executive Council on 7 April 2005 specifying Asbat al-Ansar as a terrorist organisation for the purposes of section 102.1 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995* (the Criminal Code).

Asbat al-Ansar (also known as Usbat al-Ansar and Osbat al-Ansar) was specified as a terrorist organisation under the *Criminal Code Regulations 2002* with effect from 11 April 2003.

The regulation listing Asbat al-Ansar will cease to have effect on the second anniversary of the day on which it took effect, pursuant to subsection 102.1(3) of the Criminal Code.

The regulation will be made on the basis that I continue to be satisfied on reasonable grounds that Asbat al-Ansar is an organisation directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, assisting in or fostering the doing of a terrorist act (whether or not the act has occurred or will occur).

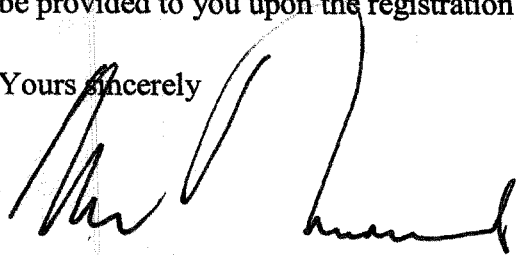
I made the decision to re-list Asbat al-Ansar following careful consideration of unclassified intelligence information provided by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) in relation to the organisation, as well as legal advice provided to me by the Australian Government Solicitor.

Section 102.1A of the Criminal Code provides that the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD may review the regulation as soon as possible after it has been made, and report the Committee's comments and recommendations to each House of the Parliament before the end of the applicable disallowance period for that House.

To assist the Committee, should it decide to review the regulation, I enclose a copy of the Statement of Reasons provided by ASIO in relation to Asbat al-Ansar, upon which my decision to re-list the organisation as a terrorist organisation was based. Additional

information detailing the procedure followed for the purposes of re-listing Asbat al-Ansar will be provided to you upon the registration of the regulation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip Ruddock', written over the typed name below.

Philip Ruddock

Asbat al-Ansar
(Also known as Usbat al-Ansar, Osbat al-Ansar)

The following information is based on publicly available details about Asbat al-Ansar (League of Partisans). These details have been corroborated by material from intelligence investigations into the activities of the Asbat al-Ansar and by official reporting. ASIO assesses that the details set out below are accurate and reliable.

Asbat al-Ansar has been proscribed as a terrorist organisation in Australia, and by the United Nations and the governments of the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.

Background

Asbat al-Ansar is a Lebanon-based Sunni Islamic extremist group that follows the same fundamentalist interpretation of Islam as al-Qa'ida, with which it is affiliated. Asbat al-Ansar was established in the early 1990s and is primarily based in the Ayn al-Hilwah Palestinian refugee camp near Sidon in southern Lebanon. The group has a smaller presence in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp outside Tripoli and has been active in Sidon, Beirut and the Dinniyeh plateau, north Lebanon. To date, Asbat al-Ansar's area of operations has been limited to Lebanon.

Since the early 1990s Asbat al-Ansar has conducted numerous attacks against targets in Lebanon that it regards as 'un-Islamic'. These include elements of the Lebanese government, foreign nationals, foreign owned businesses, churches, bars, theatres and casinos. The group has also been involved in numerous attacks on rival Palestinian and Islamic group members.

It is reported that Asbat al-Ansar is affiliated with the international al-Qai'da network from which it has received funding, and the group has also reportedly received funding from the Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi network. The group also has links to other Sunni Islamic groups operating in Lebanon. These include the al-Dinniyah group, Takfir wal Hijra, Asbat al-Nur, and Jund al-Sham which in turn have links to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's network.

Objectives

Asbat al-Ansar's objective is the establishment of a radical Sunni Islamic state in Lebanon. The group's goals include overthrowing the Lebanese government and preventing what they perceive as anti-Sunni Islamic influences in Lebanon.

Leadership and membership

Asbat al-Ansar is led by Ahmed Abd al-Karim al-Saadi (also known as Abu Muhjin/Abu Muhjen/Abu Mahjen). Al-Saadi has been sentenced to death by Lebanese authorities for the 1995 murder of Sheikh Nizar al-Halabi, the former leader of the Islamic Charity Projects Association (also known as the Ahbash movement). Since Al-Saadi's disappearance in 1999 the group has been nominally led by his brother Abu Tariq.

Attachment A

Although the exact number is not known, Asbat al-Ansar has an estimated strength of between 100 and 200 active members, most of whom are Palestinian refugees. Training and recruitment are primarily conducted within the Ayn al-Hilwa refugee camp.

Terrorist activities

Asbat al-Ansar has been involved in a number of terrorist attacks, including shootings, grenade attacks, and the use of improvised explosive devices against the Lebanese government, foreign nationals, rival Palestinian groups, nightclubs, theatres, liquor stores and Western fast food restaurants.

On the basis of available information we assess that the incidence of terrorist attacks by Asbat al-Ansar has declined. However, we assess that core members of Asbat al-Ansar remain active, maintain links to al-Qa'ida and Sunni extremist groups, including al-Zarqawi's network, and retain the intent to carry out terrorist activities.

Terrorist attacks for which responsibility has been claimed by, or reliably attributed to, Asbat al-Ansar, have included:

- Assassinations of Lebanese religious leaders and political figures and the bombing of several nightclubs, theatres and liquor stores in the mid-1990s;
- the 8 June 1999 attack on a court house in Sidon that killed four judges;
- the 8 September 1999 bombing of the Customs Department office in Sidon;
- the January 3 2000 rocket-propelled grenade attack on the Russian embassy in Beirut;
- the bombing of a church in Sidon on 17 October 2001;
- the 2001 grenade attacks on Lebanese army posts in Sidon;
- murder of a US missionary in Sidon on 21 November 2002; and
- the 2002 and 2003 attacks on Western fast food restaurants around Lebanon.

Conclusion

ASIO assesses that Asbat al-Ansar is continuing to prepare, plan and foster the commission of acts involving threats to human life and serious damage to property. This assessment is corroborated by information provided by reliable and credible intelligence sources.

In the course of pursuing its objective of creating a radical Sunni Islamic state in Lebanon, Asbat al-Ansar is known to have engaged in actions that:

- are aimed at advancing Asbat al-Ansar's political and religious causes;
- are intended to, or do, cause serious damage to property, the death of persons or endangerment of life.
- done with the intention of coercing or influencing by intimidation the government and people of Lebanon; and

Attachment A

- are intended to cause, or have caused, serious risk to the safety of sections of the public in Lebanon and other persons visiting areas in which it operates.

In view of the above information, Asbat al-Ansar is assessed to be directly or indirectly preparing, planning, and fostering the conduct of terrorist acts. Such acts include actions which are to be done and threats of actions which are to be made with the intention of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause and with the intention of coercing, or influencing by intimidation the Government and people of Lebanon. The actions or threatened actions which Asbat al-Ansar are assessed to be involved in would, if successfully completed, cause serious physical harm and death to persons and serious damage to property.