

TV art expert jailed for sales linked to Hezbollah financier



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A former Bargain Hunt art expert has been sentenced to two years and six months in prison after admitting to selling artwork to a suspected Hezbollah financier without reporting the transactions marking the UK's first prosecution of its kind under the Terrorism Act 2000.

Oghenochuko Ojiri, 53, pleaded guilty to eight counts of failing to disclose dealings with Nazem Ahmad, a Lebanese-Belgian national sanctioned by U.S. authorities in 2019 for allegedly funding

Hezbollah, a group proscribed as a terrorist organization in both the UK and U.S.

During sentencing at the Old Bailey, Judge Mrs Justice Cheema-Grubb stated that Ojiri was fully aware of Ahmad's links to terrorist financing and the exploitation of the international art market.

"Only a custodial sentence can be justified," she said. "You knew you should not have been dealing with that man."

While the court found no evidence that Ojiri supported extremism, his conduct was ruled to have undermined anti-terror finance efforts. His lawyer, Gavin Irwin, said Ojiri's "humiliation is complete," having lost his reputation and career.

The case emerged from a counter-terrorism investigation involving the Metropolitan Police, HMRC, and the police art and antiques unit. Authorities tracked suspicious payments made by Ahmad in 2020 and 2021. The U.S. Treasury claims Ahmad helped launder funds for Hezbollah and was involved in the illegal trade of "blood diamonds."

Bethan David of the CPS Counter Terrorism Division emphasized the case's importance: "This is believed to be the first prosecution of its kind. The CPS will not hesitate to act when individuals ignore the law."

Nazem Ahmad remains at large in Lebanon, with U.S. authorities offering a \$10 million reward for information leading to his capture.

