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## NEWS

### Salah allowed to plead Fifth in civil lawsuit

#### Bridgeview man accused of raising money for Palestinian militant group

*Friday, February 13, 2004*

**By Chris Hack**  
*Staff writer*

A federal magistrate has ruled Bridgeview resident Mohammed Salah cannot be forced to answer questions in a civil lawsuit accusing him and others of supporting terrorism.

Salah will be allowed to assert his Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination to avoid answering questions in the pending lawsuit brought by the parents of a teen killed in a 1996 West Bank terrorist attack, U.S. Magistrate Judge Martin Ashman ruled.

Reached Thursday, Salah declined to comment about the ruling.

The \$300 million lawsuit, filed in May 2000, accuses Salah, the Oak Lawn-based nonprofit organization he once worked for, and several other groups and individuals of forming a complex money-raising network for the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

The family's lawyers said Salah should be forced to answer questions in a deposition because in earlier court papers he had denied claims of serving as the U.S. leader of Hamas' military arm. The lawyers argued since Salah had already staked a defense in the case, he could not now assert his Fifth Amendment rights and avoid further questioning.

But Ashman noted Salah's claims came before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and circumstances have changed since then.

"One can reasonably conclude that the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade

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Center, and the attendant changes in the Justice Department's policies concerning such issues, could have impacted Mr. Salah's self-incrimination analysis," Ashman wrote in the ruling filed Monday. "More importantly ... Mr. Salah had been advised that the government had initiated an active grand jury investigation of his activities."

In an affidavit filed last month, attorney Mary Rowland confirmed Salah was the target of a federal grand jury investigation and that he had received a subpoena for documents in November.

A spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office in Chicago declined to comment.

Salah, the only U.S. citizen on the federal government's list of international terrorists, spent five years in an Israeli prison after Israeli officials said he confessed to running money for Hamas. After his release, Salah claimed the confession was written in a language he doesn't speak and was tortured out of him by Israeli authorities.

Salah has said he was not delivering money to Hamas but was visiting schools and orphanages to see where charitable donations should be directed. In an interview with the Daily Southtown three years ago, Salah said he did not quiz people he met with in the Middle East about whether they belonged to Hamas, and so may have had contact with members.

In 1998, after Salah returned to the United States, federal prosecutors froze his bank accounts and filed a civil lawsuit to seize \$1.4 million in assets. An FBI agent investigating that case said in an affidavit that Salah used Oak Lawn-based Quranic Literacy Institute to launder at least \$750,000 for Hamas. That case remains open.

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