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***News Release***

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**Cigarette smugglers’ scam in ashes**

Three Londoners caught with a million illicit cigarettes, worth £310,000 in lost duty to the UK public purse, have been sentenced.

Zana Osman, 37, from North Finchley, Piotr Zwolinski, 45, of Wembley, and Halkwat Walli, 34, originally from Iraq, were caught in Bedford with 1.15 million illicit cigarettes in their vehicle by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) investigators.

Days after being bailed in March 2017, Osman was found with £18,665 in laundered cash hidden under the driver’s seat of his BMW car. He was jailed for three years at Luton Crown Court on Friday 19 January, 2018.

Steve Bowling, Assistant Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

“These criminals were aiming to undercut legitimate retailers with this large quantity of smuggled cigarettes and tobacco. HMRC continues to target the supply of illicit tobacco, which costs the UK around £2.5 billion a year – money that could be used to fund vital public services.

“We encourage anyone with information regarding the smuggling, storage or sale of illegal tobacco to contact our fraud hotline on 0800 788 887.”

Osman denied smuggling cigarettes and money laundering, but was found guilty by a jury at Luton Crown Court on 27 November 2017. Zwolinski and Walli admitted smuggling cigarettes. Zwolinski was sentenced to 14 months in jail, suspended for two years, given a home curfew and ordered to do 240 hours of unpaid work. Walli, who had been held in custody since his arrest in March 2017 as he faced deportation action by the Home Office, was sentenced to nine months in jail on 5 September 2017 at Luton Crown Court. Walli is appealing against deportation.

Her Honour Judge Barbara Mensah made an order for the £18,665 cash to be donated to an offenders’ charity.

She said: “Osman’s account was dishonest and incredible and he deprived society of money.”

**Notes for Editors**

1. Zana OSMAN,DOB 15/12/1980, self-employed, of Copwood Close, North Finchley, denied, at Luton Crown Court on 5 September, 2017, excise offences contrary to CEMA 170(2) and Money Laundering contrary to section 327-9 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. He was sentenced to three years in jail.
2. Piotr ZWOLINSKI, DOB 21/02/1972, a builder of Grasmere Avenue, Wembley, admitted excise offences contrary to CEMA 170(2) and was sentenced to 14 months in jail, suspended for two years. He was also given a curfew for six months from 9pm to 5am and ordered to do 240 hours of unpaid work.
3. Halkwat WALLI, DOB 01/04/1983, from Iraq, is appealing against deportation. He admitted excise offences contrary to CEMA 170(2) at Luton Crown Court on 5 September 2017 and was sentenced to nine months in jail. He was held in custody since he was arrested as he was the subject of an illegal status investigation by the Home Office.
4. Photographs are available from HMRC’s Flickr channel [www.flickr.com/hmrcgovuk](http://www.flickr.com/hmrcgovuk)
5. Anyone with information about people suspected of smuggling, selling or storing illegal tobacco should contact our hotline on 0800 788 887 or report it online at: <https://www.gov.uk/report-tobacco-or-alcohol-tax-evasion>
6. Follow HMRC Press Office on Twitter @HMRCpressoffice

**Issued by HM Revenue & Customs Press Office**

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