

Lebanon sentences extremist Sunni cleric to life imprisonment

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Beirut- An extremist Sunni Muslim cleric was Friday sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment after being convicted of trying to destabilize the Lebanese government, a judicial source said.

Omar Bakri, who was tried by a military court, was accused of forming a militant extremist group in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, aimed at destabilizing security in Lebanon, the judicial source said.

From his home in Tripoli, Bakri told the German Press Agency dpa 'I am innocent and I will not go to jail.'

He had been informed of the court's verdict by his lawyer, he said.

'I have fifteen days to appeal and I will appeal this unfair verdict,' Bakri told dpa.

Bakri, who lived in Britain for nearly 20 years after seeking political asylum in 1986, was banned from returning to London in 2005 after the authorities deemed his presence 'not conducive to the public good.'

Bakri had praised the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, describing the hijackers as the 'magnificent 19.'

The Sunni clergyman also headed the radical Islamist group, al- Muhajiroun from north London until it was disbanded in 2005.

After a series of coordinated bombings of the London transport network in 2005, in which 52 people were killed and 700 injured, Bakri blamed the British government and the public for the attacks. dpa