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**Office of the Inspector General
Miami-Dade County**

Memorandum

To: The Honorable Carlos Alvarez, Mayor

The Honorable Chairperson Joe Martinez
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

From:  Christopher Mazzella
Inspector General

Date: June 23, 2005

Re: OIG investigation into filing of forged deeds at the Miami-Dade County Recorder's
Office

An investigation by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), the Miami-Dade Police Department, and the State Attorney's Office has resulted today in the arrest of Sameer Muhammad (Muhammad), a.k.a. Simmie Lee Ford, Jr. and the filing of an arrest warrant for his accomplice Carolyn Murphy (Murphy), a.k.a. Ceceila Martin, who is now a fugitive. The joint investigation uncovered a scheme to defraud Miami-Dade County property owners of their homes.

The investigation revealed a scheme by Muhammad and Murphy to obtain real estate by filing forged deeds with the Office of the County Recorder, selling the homes and pocketing the sales proceeds. Both Murphy and Muhammad were charged with the theft of the homes of Bernice Albury-Ivy and Lucille Hicks.

Murphy, under the names of Ceceila Martin and Carolyn Murphy, was mysteriously deeded the properties belonging to Herbert and Clarice Albury and Lucille Hicks. Once the properties were in Murphy's control, Muhammad, through his real estate investment corporation, Bar None Properties, Inc., would contact a real estate investment firm stating he had a seller in need of selling her home. As the middle man, Muhammad received proceeds from both the Albury and Hicks sales, as did Murphy.

In both cases, the initial transfer of title to Murphy was not only completely fraudulent but actually impossible. The OIG investigation found that on March 16, 2004, a Warranty Deed was recorded in the Office of the County Recorder deeding the Albury property to Ceceila Martin. The deed was purportedly signed by both Herbert and Clarice Albury on January 20, 2004. Herbert and Clarice Albury are deceased since 1975 and 1985, respectively. Bernice Albury-Ivy, their daughter, maintained the property upon their death.

Similarly, in the case of the Hicks property, a Quit Claim Deed was recorded in the Office of the County Recorder deeding the property to Carolyn Murphy on March 22, 2004. The deed was purportedly signed by Ms. Lucille Hicks on November 22, 2003. At that time, Ms. Hicks was a patient at the Regents Park Nursing Home suffering from dementia and other ailments. Ms. Hicks sister-in-law, Doris McDade, who held Power of Attorney to act on Ms. Hicks' behalf, never authorized the sale or transfer of the property. Ms. Hicks is now deceased.

In both cases, not only were the signatures of the grantors (Albury and Hicks) fraudulent, but the notary's signatures were also fraudulent. The identities of actual notaries, commissioned with the State of Florida, were fraudulently used to accomplish the false transfer of title to both the Albury and Hicks properties. Additionally, Murphy stole the identity of Cecile A. Martin and possessed a fraudulent Florida Driver's License in order to perpetrate the theft of the Albury property.

Muhammad, who actively sought the sale of the Albury property, received \$19,000 as an assignment fee from the sale while Murphy received \$1,074.72 after all liens and taxes were paid. In the case of the Hicks property, Muhammad fraudulently obtained a mortgage to purchase the property from Murphy, who received \$60,921.74 from the sale. Muhammad later sold the property to an innocent purchaser, and received \$20,584.01 in proceeds from the re-sale of the Hicks property. Ultimately, both the Albury property and the Hicks property ended up in the hands of innocent buyers who not only expended monies, but do not have clear title to the properties. The investigation into other fraudulently recorded deeds and property thefts continues, and the OIG expects that there will be additional arrests in this case.

For your information, the OIG has detected a serious crime problem impacting the more vulnerable segments of our community relative to certain real estate transactions and has, thus, expanded its investigation(s) to ferret out similar schemes to deprive other citizens of their homes.

cc: The Honorable Senator Gwen Margolis
The Honorable Chief Judge Joseph P. Farina
The Honorable Judge Stuart Simons
The Honorable Judge Jon Gordon
The Hon. Harvey Ruvlin, Clerk of County and Circuit Courts
Mr. George Burgess, County Manager
Ms. Cathy Jackson, Director, Audit & Management Services

Clerk of the Board (copy filed)



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

CON-ARTISTS CHARGED FOR STEALING HOMES AND FILING FORGED DEEDS

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the Miami-Dade Police Department's (MDPD) Elderly Exploitation Unit announced today the arrest of Sameer Muhammad a.k.a. Simmie Lee Ford, Jr. (Muhammad), age 48, of Miami-Dade County, on organized fraud, theft, fraudulent mortgage, and identity theft charges. The joint investigation, which included the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office, uncovered a scheme to defraud Miami-Dade County property owners of their homes. An Arrest Warrant has been filed against Carolyn Murphy, a.k.a. Ceceila Martin (Murphy), age 47, of Miami-Dade County, who participated with Muhammad in the theft of the properties and used stolen identities in connection with the fraud. She is currently a fugitive.

The investigation revealed a scheme by Muhammad and Murphy to obtain real estate by filing forged deeds with the Office of the County Recorder, selling the homes and pocketing the sales proceeds. Both Murphy and Muhammad were charged with the theft of the homes of Bernice Albury-Ivy and Lucille Hicks.

According to an Affidavit filed by the OIG and MDPD, Murphy, under the names of Ceceila Martin and Carolyn Murphy, was mysteriously deeded the properties belonging to Herbert and Clarice Albury and Lucille Hicks. Once the properties were in Murphy's control, Muhammad, through his real estate investment corporation, Bar None Properties, Inc., P.O. Box 478510, Miami, FL, would contact a real estate investment firm stating he had a seller in need of selling her home. As the middle man, Muhammad received proceeds from both the Albury and Hicks sales, as did Murphy.

In both cases, the initial transfer of title to Murphy was not only completely fraudulent but actually impossible. Bernice Albury-Ivy had been holding on to and maintaining the property belonging to her parents, Herbert and Clarice Albury, since their deaths in 1975 and 1985, respectively. The OIG investigation found that on March 16, 2004, a warranty deed was recorded in the Office of the County Recorder deeding the Albury property to Ceceila Martin. Though deceased, the deed was purportedly signed by both Herbert and Clarice Albury on January 20, 2004.

Similarly, in the case of the Hicks property, a Quit Claim Deed was recorded in the Office of the County Recorder deeding the property to Carolyn Murphy on March 22, 2004. The deed was purportedly signed by Ms. Lucille Hicks on November 22, 2003. At that time, Ms. Hicks was a patient at the Regents Park Nursing Home suffering from dementia and other ailments. Ms. Hicks sister-in-law, Doris McDade, held Power of Attorney to act on Ms. Hicks' behalf. Ms. McDade, who resides out of state, never authorized the sale or transfer of the property.

In both cases, not only were the signatures of the grantors (Albury and Hicks) fraudulent, but the notary's signatures were also fraudulent. The identities of actual notaries, commissioned with the State of Florida, were fraudulently used to accomplish the false transfer of title to both the Albury and Hicks properties. Additionally, Murphy stole the identity of Cecile A. Martin and possessed a fraudulent Florida Driver's License in order to perpetrate the theft of the Albury property.

Muhammad actively sought the sale of the Albury property and received \$19,000 as an assignment fee from the sale. Murphy received \$1,074.72 from the Albury property sale after all liens and taxes owed were paid. In the case of the Hicks property, Muhammad fraudulently obtained a mortgage to purchase the property from Murphy. Murphy received \$60,921.74 from the sale of the Hicks property. Several months later, Muhammad, through Bar None Properties, Inc., sold the property to an innocent purchaser, and received \$20,584.01 in proceeds from the re-sale of the Hicks property. Ultimately, both the Albury property and the Hicks property ended in the hands of innocent buyers who not only expended monies, but do not have clear title to the properties.

Inspector General Christopher Mazzella and Director Robert Parker, in commenting on the charges brought against Muhammad and Murphy, described them as indiscriminate predators who employed refined scams to perpetrate frauds against defenseless ordinary citizens. They were particularly stunned by their brazenness in manipulating the County Recorder's Office to carry out their schemes to victimize helpless and disadvantaged property owners at the time they were most vulnerable. Mr. Mazzella noted that the investigations are continuing and that additional arrests are expected as more stolen properties are discovered. In particular, the investigation is being broadened to determine whether Muhammad and Murphy used similar schemes to deprive other citizens of their homes. Mr. Mazzella emphasized that the OIG has detected a serious crime problem impacting the more vulnerable segments of our community relative to certain real estate transactions and has thus, expanded its investigation(s) to ferret out similar schemes to deprive other citizens of their homes.

Media Opportunity – Inspector General Mazzella will be available for a media opportunity today, between 1:30 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. at the OIG office.