

## Alleged al-Qaida Terrorist Cell on Trial in Brussels

Lisa Bryant | Paris 08 March 2010

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### Photo: AP

Belgian judge Pierre Hendrickx, right, prepares to start the trial of alleged al-Qaida terror cell suspects at the justice palace in Brussels, 8 Mar 2010

Nine alleged members of an al-Qaida terrorist cell are on trial in Brussels on charges of having recruited jihadists and prepared terrorist attacks.

Seven of the terror suspects appeared in a Brussels court. Two others are still on the run and being judged in absentia.

The nine are charged with recruiting militants for al-Qaida and having planned terrorist attacks. They were arrested during a police operation in 2008, on the eve of a European Union summit in the Belgian capital. If found guilty, the suspects face up to 10 years in prison.

The trial is notable in that it includes a woman, Belgian-Moroccan Malika El Aroud, 50, who has prior convictions in Belgium and Switzerland and has served time in jail for jihadist propaganda.

Claude Moniquet, a Belgium terrorism specialist, who heads the European Intelligence and Security Center, says in many ways Aroud is central to al-Qaida operations in Europe, and a trendsetter, of sorts, for women's participation in the terror group.

"Malika opened the way, she opened the way for women [to be] active in propaganda in promoting recruiting and so on," said Moniquet. "And she could be a kind of icon, and she is a kind of icon used by the al-Qaida propaganda to attract and recruit other women."

But Moniquet believes a woman's role in al-Qaida will remain marginal.

The terror trial is the latest in a number of trials in Belgium and Europe targeting terror suspects. Moniquet credits European justice and security officials with stepping up counterterrorism operations since the 2001 terror attacks on the United States.

"Since September 11, dozens, many dozens, maybe 100 terrorist attacks in Europe, have been avoided because of the actions of justice, security services, intelligence services and police. And that is not so bad," add Moniquet.

The Brussels trial is expected to last about three weeks.