

**Press Release: Steptoe & Johnson advise on US\$400 million dispute between founders of Afghan mobile telephone company**

17 April 2009

International law firm Steptoe & Johnson today confirmed that they have issued High Court proceedings in London on behalf of four clients who are suing Telephone Systems International, Inc. (TSI), Afghan Wireless Communications Company (AWCC), which is a joint venture with the Afghan Ministry of Communications, Ehsanollah Bayat and Mark Warner in a US\$400 million plus shareholder dispute.

The Claimants are three British individuals, Lord Michael Cecil, Mr Stuart Bentham and Mr Alexander Grinling together with a Swiss national, Mr Joakim Lehmkuhl who set up the first commercial mobile telephony company in Afghanistan in 1998/1999 together with Ehsanollah Bayat, now widely considered one of the wealthiest businessman in Afghanistan, and who may have political aspirations in the upcoming Presidential elections. AWCC, the company which was established by the group, is now one of the most successful mobile companies in Afghanistan with approximately 3 million subscribers. The Claimants say that Bayat has wrongfully denied them their shares in the company. They claim from the Defendants in excess of US\$400million, being the estimated value of their shareholding together with a proportionate share of businesses and assets acquired or set up by Bayat, such as the Ariana Television Network and the Bayat Foundation, using the companies' money, including money and/or assets rightfully belonging to the Claimants. Although AWCC is Afghan based and the holding company,

TSI, is based in New Jersey, USA with offices in Delhi and Dubai, the claim has been brought in London because that is where the contract was made in 1998 and therefore in English law there is a presumption that English law should determine their shareholder rights.

The claims, which include fraud, conspiracy, deceit and breach of trust, are also brought against a former shareholder, Mark Warner, a self-employed private banker and a British national with homes in London, New York and the Caribbean. The Claimants' case is that the Defendants have previously filed documents under oath with the US Federal Communications Commission acknowledging that at least two of the Claimants have shares in the New Jersey holding company.

Step toe & Johnson International Dispute Resolution Partner Adam Greaves is leading the case.

*Notes to the editor:*

*1. With more than 500 lawyers, the firm provides advice and representation in a wide range of legal fields. In more than 60 years of practice, the firm has gained an international reputation for vigorous representation of clients before governmental agencies, successful advocacy in litigation and arbitration and creative and practical advice in guiding business transactions. The firm has offices in London, Brussels, Washington, New York, Chicago, Phoenix, Los Angeles and Century City.*

*2. The London office of Steptoe & Johnson has more than 35 lawyers practising international dispute resolution, fraud and arbitration, commercial property, construction, corporate, technology and telecoms, insurance & reinsurance, international trade, tax and employment. The office was short listed for Legal Business' 2008 US Law Firm of the Year award and is recommended by the 2008 edition of the UK Legal 500 for Arbitration, Commercial Litigation and Fraud work.*

*3. A copy of the claim form and particulars of claim are available on request from Steptoe & Johnson.*

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