



# UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

## *Southern District of New York*

U.S. ATTORNEY DAMIAN WILLIAMS

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### **NEW YORK CITY MAYOR ERIC ADAMS CHARGED WITH BRIBERY AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE OFFENSES**

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, James E. Dennehy, the Assistant Director in Charge of the New York Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"), and Jocelyn E. Strauber, the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation ("DOI"), announced today the unsealing of an Indictment charging ERIC ADAMS, the Mayor of New York City, with bribery, campaign finance, and conspiracy offenses. The case is assigned to U.S. District Judge Dale E. Ho.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: "As alleged, Mayor Adams abused his position as this City's highest elected official, and before that as Brooklyn Borough President, to take bribes and solicit illegal campaign contributions. By allegedly taking improper and illegal benefits from foreign nationals—including to allow a Manhattan skyscraper to open without a fire inspection—Adams put the interests of his benefactors, including a foreign official, above those of his constituents. This Office and our partners at the FBI and DOI will continue to pursue corruption anywhere in this City, especially when that corruption takes the form of illegal foreign influence on our democratic system."

FBI Assistant Director James E. Dennehy said: "Today's indictment serves as a sobering moment but also sends a powerful message to every elected official in this country: public service is a profound responsibility, and it should be a noble calling. When that's perverted by greed and dishonesty, it robs us of our trust. This is a reminder that no one is above the law or beyond reproach."

DOI Commissioner Jocelyn E. Strauber said: "The indictment unsealed today alleges that Mayor Adams abused his power and position for nearly a decade, obtaining personal benefits and illegal campaign contributions from foreign nationals, and others, giving them undue influence over him. As charged, this illegal conduct compromised his integrity as an elected official and New Yorkers expect better. I thank the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern

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District of New York and the FBI for their commitment to partner with DOI to root out corruption in City government.”

As alleged in the Indictment:<sup>1</sup>

For nearly a decade, ADAMS has used his prominent positions in New York City government to obtain illegal campaign contributions and luxury travel. ADAMS solicited and accepted these benefits from foreign nationals, businessmen, and others. ADAMS then pressured the New York City Fire Department to facilitate the opening of a foreign government’s Manhattan skyscraper that had not passed a fire inspection. To conceal this criminal conduct, ADAMS took steps to hide his receipt of improper benefits from the public and law enforcement.

In 2014, ADAMS was elected Brooklyn Borough President. Thereafter, ADAMS sought and accepted improper valuable benefits, such as luxury international travel, including from wealthy foreign businesspeople and at least one Turkish government official seeking to gain influence over him. By 2018, ADAMS—who had by then made known his plans to run for Mayor of New York City—not only accepted, but sought illegal campaign contributions to his 2021 mayoral campaign from foreign nationals, as well as other things of value. As ADAMS’s prominence and power grew, his foreign-national benefactors sought to cash-in on their corrupt relationships with him, particularly when it became clear that ADAMS would become New York City’s mayor in 2021. ADAMS agreed, providing favorable treatment in exchange for the illicit benefits he received. After his inauguration as Mayor of New York City, ADAMS soon began preparing for his next election, including by planning to solicit more illegal contributions and granting requests from those who supported his 2021 mayoral campaign with such donations.

ADAMS sought and accepted illegal campaign contributions in the form of “nominee” or “straw” contributions, meaning that the true contributors conveyed their money through nominal donors, who falsely certified they were contributing their own money. By smuggling their contributions to ADAMS through U.S.-based straw donors, ADAMS’s overseas contributors defeated federal laws that serve to prevent foreign influence on U.S. elections. Wealthy individuals evaded laws designed to limit their power over elected officials by restricting the amount any one person can donate to a candidate. And businesses circumvented New York City’s ban on corporate contributions by funneling their donations through multiple employees, frustrating a law which seeks to reduce corporate power in politics. ADAMS increased his fundraising by accepting these concealed, illegal donations—at the cost of giving his secret patrons the undue influence over him that the law tries to prevent.

ADAMS compounded his gains from the straw contributions by using them to defraud New York City and steal public funds. New York City has a matching funds program that matches small-dollar contributions from individual City residents with up to eight times their amount in public funds, to give New Yorkers a greater voice in elections. ADAMS’s campaigns applied for matching funds based on known straw donations, fraudulently obtaining as much as

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<sup>1</sup> As the introductory phrase signifies, the entirety of the Indictment and the descriptions of the Indictment set forth herein constitute only allegations, and every fact described should be treated as an allegation.

\$2,000 in public funds for each illegal contribution. ADAMS and those working at his direction falsely certified compliance with applicable campaign finance regulations despite ADAMS's repeated acceptance of straw donations, relying on the concealed nature of these illegal contributions to falsely portray his campaigns as law-abiding. As a result of those false certifications, ADAMS's 2021 mayoral campaign received more than \$10,000,000 in public funds.

ADAMS also sought and received other improper benefits from some of the same co-conspirators who funneled straw donations to his campaigns. In particular, a senior official in the Turkish diplomatic establishment (the "Turkish Official"), who facilitated many straw donations to ADAMS, also arranged for ADAMS and his companions to receive free or discounted travel on Turkey's national airline (the "Turkish Airline"), which is owned in significant part by the Turkish Government, to destinations including France, China, Sri Lanka, India, Hungary, and Turkey itself. The Turkish Official and other Turkish nationals further arranged for ADAMS and his companions to receive, among other things, free rooms at opulent hotels, free meals at high-end restaurants, and free luxurious entertainment—while in Turkey.

ADAMS and others working at his direction repeatedly took steps to shield his solicitation and acceptance of these benefits from public scrutiny. ADAMS did not disclose the travel benefits he had obtained in annual financial disclosures he was required to file as a New York City employee. Sometimes, ADAMS agreed to pay a nominal fee, to create the appearance of having paid for travel that was heavily discounted. Other times, ADAMS created and instructed others to create fake paper trails, falsely suggesting that he had paid, or planned to pay, for travel benefits that were actually free. And ADAMS deleted messages with others involved in his misconduct, including, in one instance, assuring a co-conspirator in writing that he "always" deleted her messages.

In September 2021, the Turkish Official told ADAMS that it was his turn to repay the Turkish Official, by pressuring the New York City Fire Department ("FDNY") to facilitate the opening of a new Turkish consular building—a 36-story skyscraper—without a fire inspection, in time for a high-profile visit by Turkey's president. At the time, the building would have failed an FDNY inspection. In exchange for free travel and other travel-related bribes in 2021 and 2022 arranged by the Turkish Official, ADAMS did as instructed. Because of ADAMS's pressure on the FDNY, the FDNY official responsible for the FDNY's assessment of the skyscraper's fire safety was told that he would lose his job if he failed to acquiesce, and, after ADAMS intervened, the skyscraper opened as requested by the Turkish Official.

If you believe you have information related to bribery, fraud, or any other illegal conduct by ADAMS or any other New York City employees, please contact DOI at [tipline@doi.nyc.gov](mailto:tipline@doi.nyc.gov) or (212) 825-2828. If you were involved in such conduct, please consider self-disclosing through the SDNY Whistleblower Pilot Program at [USANYS.WBP@usdoj.gov](mailto:USANYS.WBP@usdoj.gov).

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ADAMS, 64, of Brooklyn, New York, is charged with one count of conspiracy to receive campaign contributions from foreign nationals and commit wire fraud and bribery, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison; one count of wire fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison; two counts of soliciting campaign contributions from foreign nationals, which each carry a maximum sentence of five years in prison; and one count of soliciting and accepting a bribe, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

The statutory maximum penalties are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the judge.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding work of the FBI and DOI.

The prosecution of this case is being handled by the Office's Public Corruption Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Hagan Scotten, Celia V. Cohen, Andrew Rohrbach, and Derek Wikstrom are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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