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## CERN Physicist Gets 5 Years for Plotting Terror

by *Barbara Casassus* on 4 May 2012, 11:41 AM | [1 Comments](#)



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**PARIS**—Franco-Algerian particle physicist Adlène Hicheur was condemned today to a 5-year prison sentence, including one year suspended, on terrorism charges. But Hicheur, 35, may be released before the end of June, says his lawyer, Patrick Baudouin, because of possible sentence reductions and the time he has already spent in custody. Hicheur, a former CERN researcher, has been held in "preventive detention" in a high-security jail near Paris since October 2009.

The prosecution in Hicheur's case had asked for a 6-year prison term. During his [trial on 29 and 30 March](#), Hicheur acknowledged exchanging e-mails with Mustafa Debchi, an alleged member of al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, and discussing future terrorist actions. Baudouin admitted that words used by Hicheur in the e-mails were "disturbing" but argued that his client never took any concrete steps toward a terrorist act. Hicheur himself testified that he had taken morphine because he was in pain at the time, and that he was in a "turbulent period." The court ruled that Hicheur was guilty of "participation in a criminal organization whose goal was to plan terrorist acts."

Hicheur has not decided whether he will appeal, Baudouin told *SciencInsider*. He has 10 days to decide, but "he does not have great confidence in the [French] justice system's impartiality towards him," Baudouin says.

The trial was "a complete fiasco," says Hicheur's younger brother Halim, a neuroscientist at the University of Grenoble in France. "The prosecution failed to prove that Adlène was planning terrorist attacks in France or had associated with criminals," he told *SciencInsider*. "The questioning was oriented towards ideology and whether he was a salafist or a jihadist, and his answer was that he was neither."

Hicheur can't return to CERN, says Aurelio Bay, the head of the particle physics laboratory at the Federal Polytechnic School of Lausanne (EPFL) in Switzerland, who recruited Hicheur in 2005 to participate in CERN's [Large Hadron Collider beauty experiment](#). Hicheur was on a 4-year, nonrenewable contract that ended a few months after his arrest, and EPFL does not have permanent posts available, says Bay, who's a member of an international committee supporting Hicheur that also includes 1988 physics Nobel laureate Jack Steinberger.

Bay describes Hicheur as an "excellent and extremely conscientious researcher, and a dedicated teacher."

The trial was held when France was still recovering from the slaughter earlier in March of seven children and soldiers in Toulouse and Montauban by an Islamic radical, Mohamed Merah. Baudouin had suggested asking for the trial to be postponed, but Hicheur had refused to do so.

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