

Hunt reveals foreign payments

BROOKLINE, Mass. (AP) — Convicted Watergate burglar and former CIA agent E. Howard Hunt says giving money to foreign governments, like the reported grants to Jordan's King Hussein, is "an honored tradition within the CIA."

He said at a news conference Thursday that he made substantial cash payments to government officials in Japan, Mexico and Uruguay while working as a CIA station chief.

"The payments to foreign governments or to specific sections of their national police or clandestine service is a long and honored tradition within the CIA," Hunt said. "There is certainly nothing illegal about this."

Hunt did not say how much money was involved, where it came from or who received it.

Hunt, 58, made the comments at his first news conference since leaving the federal prison at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., Wednesday.

The session was held at the suburban Boston office of his booking agent, who will oversee a series of lecture tours

Hunt has planned.

Hunt served 32 months in prison after pleading guilty to conspiracy, burglary and illegal wiretapping in the 1972 break-in at Democratic national headquarters in the Washington, D.C., Watergate complex.

He said he assumed the payments, which he called "subsidies," were made in exchange for cooperation with the CIA.

"When I was chief of station abroad in many areas, it was common for me to pay substantial figures to government persons of the local host government," Hunt said. "I certainly supported Uruguayan intelligence, the Mexican intelligence service — they have six or seven different ones — and the Japanese at one period."

Hunt compared his role in the Watergate burglary to his earlier job as a CIA officer.

"My involvement at Watergate was solely a continuum of my years in the CIA in which I followed the orders of my superiors," he said.

Hunt, who recruited the break-in team, said he had been instructed to

"photograph anything with a number on it."

He said he did not deal with then President Richard M. Nixon and top White House advisers, but assumed from the amount of money involved in the case that the Watergate break-in "was a White House-approved activity."

Hunt said he feels "a pretty good amount of bitterness" toward Judge John Sirica, who sentenced him, and White House officials who he said tried to save themselves after his career was ruined.

"I paid my price for Watergate in sorrow and lost, wasted years, in tragedy, ridicule and humiliation," Hunt said. "I feel no public act of contrition can be required of me."

Nixon could have averted "the horrendous tragedy" of Watergate by admitting soon after the break-in that the men involved worked for him in what he thought was a good cause, Hunt said.

"The break-in itself was a minor legal problem," he said. "It was the hysteria afterward that ballooned this into a major international tragedy."