

Recent Developments in Human Trafficking Cases

October 9, 2009

Attached below please find press releases announcing recent developments in the fight against human trafficking.

Yesterday, four defendants were convicted in labor trafficking cases, three in Pennsylvania and one in California.

In the Middle District of Pennsylvania, three defendants pled guilty for their respective roles in a conspiracy to commit labor trafficking, forced labor, and marriage fraud. The defendants recruited victims to travel from Vietnam to the United States, then held the victims in compelled service in nail salons.

Meanwhile, in the Northern District of California, after a week-long trial, a jury returned a verdict of guilty on all five counts—conspiracy, visa fraud, forced labor, document servitude, and alien harboring—against a defendant who held a Peruvian victim in servitude as a nanny and housekeeper for two years without pay, using a scheme of threats and control over the victim’s identification documents.

Earlier this week, a defendant pled guilty in Kansas City, Missouri to forced labor in connection with a wide-scale labor racketeering, visa fraud, and forced labor scheme that exploited guest workers in fourteen states. The defendant, a Moldovan national, was charged along with 11 co-defendants in an indictment returned on May 6, 2009.

On September 8, 2009, three defendants were charged in the Eastern District of New York for their roles in a scheme that compelled young Central American women into service as bar waitresses and into prostitution, using physical force and threats of deportation to intimidate and control the victims.

In Baltimore, Maryland, a defendant was sentenced to 52 months in prison for conspiracy to engage in the sex trafficking through a scheme that targeted U.S. citizen victims, including minors.

In the District of Hawaii, three defendants were charged on August 27, 2009 in connection with a scheme to coerce the labor and services of Thai agricultural workers recruited to enter the United States on guestworker visas, through a scheme of debts, threats of serious economic harm, and control over the victims’ identification documents.

Previously, a defendant pled guilty in Newark, New Jersey to conspiracy, forced labor, and related offenses arising from his role in holding young West African women and girls in servitude in hairbraiding salons, working them up to fourteen hours a day, six or seven days a week, and retaining their earnings for the benefit of the defendants, using physical force and threats to hold the victims in their service.

In an indictment unsealed August 25, 2009, six defendants were charged in Houston, TX, on charges of conspiracy, sex trafficking of minors, and sex trafficking by force, fraud, or coercion, arising from the use of beatings and threats to compel U.S. citizen women and girls into prostitution for the profit of the defendants.

August also brought significant sentences in a major international sex trafficking case in which nine defendants were convicted in connection with a scheme to compel young Guatemalan women and girls

into prostitution using threats of violence, threats of harm to the victims' families, psychological manipulation, intimidation, and control. The five defendants sentenced in late August were convicted in February, 2009 after a six-week trial. The lead defendant was sentenced to 40 years in prison, another was sentenced to 35 years, and three others were each sentenced to 30 years. Four additional defendants had previously entered guilty pleas in connection with the scheme.

On July 30, 2009 two additional defendants pled guilty in connection with a sex trafficking operation that victimized young Mexican women and girls in Atlanta, luring them on false promises of a better life only to compel them into prostitution through violence and strict controls. Two defendants had previously entered guilty pleas in connection with the scheme.

The previous week, defendant Waquita Wallace was sentenced to 20 years in prison based on her conviction for sex trafficking by force, fraud, or coercion arising from her role in compelling a young U.S. citizen victim, a resident of St. Louis, Missouri, to engage in prostitution. Two other defendants were convicted in connection with the offense.

Each of these accomplishments is the result of sustained, collaborative efforts on the part of multiple law enforcement agencies and victim service providers. We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with all of our colleagues in our ongoing efforts to combat human trafficking.

Hilary Axam
Acting Director
Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit
Criminal Section, Civil Rights Division



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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
October 6, 2009

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**THREE PEOPLE PLEAD GUILTY FOR THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN A FORCED LABOR TRAFFICKING,
MARRIAGE FRAUD AND FORCED LABOR ORGANIZATION**

Three people charged in December 2008 for their involvement in a forced labor organization pleaded guilty today. Lynda Dieu Phan, age 39; Duc Cao Nguyen, age 41, both of New Cumberland, Pennsylvania; and Justin Phan, age 36, of Tennessee pleaded guilty before United States District Court Judge Sylvia H. Rambo today. Lynda Dieu Phan pleaded guilty to criminal conspiracy to commit forced labor trafficking, forced labor, and marriage fraud. Both Duc Cao Nguyen and Justin Phan pleaded guilty to marriage fraud.

According to Dennis Pfannenschmidt, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, and Andrew M. McLees, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the Department of Homeland Security–Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Investigations in Philadelphia, beginning sometime in 2000 until August 2008, Lynda Dieu Phan, Duc Cao Nguyen, and Justin Phan, conspired that Lynda Dieu Phan travel to Vietnam to recruit victims to work in her nail salons located in the York area. Fraudulent marriages were arranged so the victims could gain entry into the United States. Upon entry, the victims were forced to work at Lynda Dieu Phan’s nail salons.

The defendants could be sentenced to up to a maximum of five years’ imprisonment; a \$250,000 fine and up to three years supervised release. A sentencing date has not been scheduled.

This case is being investigated by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Christy H. Fawcett.



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2009
WWW.JUSTICE.GOV

CRT
(202) 514-2007
TDD (202) 514-1888

MOLDOVAN NATIONAL PLEADS GUILTY TO FORCED LABOR TRAFFICKING

WASHINGTON – A Moldovan national pleaded guilty today in federal court in Kansas City, Mo., for his role in a forced labor trafficking scheme that victimized workers in 14 states, the Justice Department announced.

Alexandru Frumusache, 24, a citizen of the republic of Moldova residing in Kansas City, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Ortrie D. Smith this afternoon to the charge contained in a May 6, 2009, federal indictment.

In or around September 2008, Frumusache began working for Giant Labor Solutions in Kansas City. According to the court documents, between September 2008 and the end of April 2009, he knowingly aided and abetted others in a scheme to cause foreign

workers (including nationals of the Philippines, Dominican Republic and Jamaica) to believe that if they failed or refused to work where and when ordered, they would be deported, their H2B work visas would be cancelled, or they or their family members would be penalized with a \$5,000 to \$10,000 fee.

Frumusache is subject to a sentence of up to 20 years in federal prison without parole, as well as a fine of up to \$250,000 and an order of restitution. A sentencing hearing is scheduled for Feb. 25, 2010.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Gene Porter, William L. Meiners and Cynthia L. Cordes and Trial Attorney Jim Felte with the Civil Rights Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit. It was investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; the FBI; the Labor Department; OIG – Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations; IRS – Criminal Investigation; the Kansas Department of Revenue – Criminal Investigations; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service and the Independence, Mo., Police Department.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

THREE ARRESTED IN LONG ISLAND SEX TRAFFICKING AND ALIEN HARBORING CASE

Owners and Manager of Lake Ronkonkoma and Farmingville Bars Charged

Two owners and the manager of two Suffolk County bars were arrested last night pursuant to a federal complaint charging them with crimes involving forced prostitution. The complaint charges Antonio Rivera, Jasmin Rivera, and John Whaley with conspiracy, sex trafficking, forced labor, and alien harboring.¹ Simultaneously with the arrests, law enforcement agents executed search warrants at both bars. The defendants are scheduled to make their initial appearances this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Michael L. Orenstein at the U.S. Courthouse, in Central Islip, New York.

The charges were announced by Benton J. Campbell, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York; John Morton, Assistant Secretary, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), New York; Richard Dormer, Suffolk County Police Commissioner; Joseph M. Demarest, Jr., Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), New York Field Office; and Patricia J. Haynes, Special Agent-in-Charge, Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Criminal Investigation, New York.

According to the complaint unsealed today, the joint investigation revealed that Antonio Rivera, a Registered Sex Offender, and his sister Jasmin Rivera owned and operated the Sonidos de la Frontera bar, located in Lake Ronkonkoma, and the La Hija del Mariachi bar, located in Farmingville. Whaley was employed as a manager in both bars. From September 2007 through the present, the Riveras and Whaley allegedly lured young women, primarily Central American illegal immigrants, to work in the bars as waitresses and hostesses. Some of the women were as young as 17 years of age. As set forth in the complaint, after the women began working in the bars, the defendants forced them to engage in sex acts with bar patrons in exchange for money, with the defendants keeping half of the proceeds. When the women refused or resisted, the defendants used physical force, including rape and assaults, and threatened to report the women to immigration authorities. The defendants also controlled the movement of the women between the bars and other locations in Hempstead, Huntington, and Brentwood, transporting them in vehicles registered to the Riveras and Whaley. The complaint also charges the defendants with conspiring to harbor illegal aliens by concealing the women's true identities and immigration status from state licensing agencies and law enforcement authorities.

“As described in the complaint, sex trafficking preys upon vulnerable young women for profit and degrades both the individual victims and the communities where these crimes are committed,” stated United States Attorney Campbell. “This Office will continue to vigorously investigate and prosecute such crimes.”

ICE Assistant Secretary Morton stated, “As alleged in the complaint, these defendants lured innocent young women into the United States with promises of legitimate jobs and the American dream, but once the victims arrived, their dreams turned into nightmares as the defendants used threats and violence to force them into prostitution,” said Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Morton. “ICE is at the forefront of the U.S. Government’s response to international human trafficking. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to combat this egregious crime.”

Suffolk County Police Commissioner Dormer stated, “These serious crimes against young women will not be tolerated in Suffolk County. This Department values its role as the local law enforcement component of the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force for Long Island. This case demonstrates the effectiveness of the task force paradigm, which coordinates the efforts of local and federal law enforcement agencies, as well as community service agencies, support groups, and educational entities. We hope these arrests will put others on notice that sex trafficking and similar crimes will continue to be a high priority for this Department.”

FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Demarest stated, “Forced labor is tantamount to enslavement. The form of forced labor charged here made young women, some of them minors, sex slaves. As inhuman as that was, if they resisted, they were allegedly subjected to even worse. We are committed to protecting the vulnerable, whatever their status.”

IRS Special Agent-in-Charge Haynes stated, “People typically don’t think about IRS Criminal Investigators being involved with a sex trafficking case. But what it all comes down to is greed. Our value to this investigation comes through working with our law enforcement partners and use our financial expertise to track down the proceeds of the charged crimes.”

If convicted, the defendants face a sentence of 15 years to life imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine in connection with the sex trafficking charges, up to life imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine in connection with the forced labor charges, and a maximum sentence of 20 years of imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine on the alien harboring charges.

The government’s case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Demetri Jones and John Durham.

Department of Justice
Office of Public Affairs
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, September 8, 2009

Maryland Man Sentenced on Federal Sex Trafficking Charge

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department announced today defendant Paul Raymond Green was sentenced late last week to 52 months in prison and three years of supervised release for his role in a scheme to prostitute minor females.

Green, 23, previously pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit sex trafficking. Green admitted that he, through his co-conspirator, arranged on two separate occasions in 2007 to provide minor victims to an acquaintance who paid to have sex with the victims. On both occasions, cigarettes dipped in phencyclidine liquid known as PCP, called "dippers" or "wets," were available in the hotel room where the girls were brought to have sex. Green also sold cocaine to that same individual.

"The defendant in this case took an active role in prostituting young girls, violating their civil rights in order to facilitate his drug sales," said Loretta King, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "This type of crime is beyond despicable, and the Justice Department remains committed to prosecuting such cases."

"Anyone who pays for or profits from sex with a child should be on notice that Maryland's human trafficking task force is committed to a policy of zero tolerance for child prostitution," said U.S. Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein for the District of Maryland.

Acting Assistant Attorney General King and U.S. Attorney Rosenstein commend the FBI and the Montgomery County Police Department for their work in this cooperative investigation and prosecution. Assistant U.S. Attorney Solette Magnelli and Civil Rights Division Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit attorney Jim Felte are prosecuting this case for the Government.

This case was investigated by the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force, created in 2007 to discover and rescue victims while identifying and prosecuting offenders. For more information about the Task Force, please visit <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/md/Human-Trafficking/>.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aug. 26, 2009

Togolese Man Admits Conspiring with His Wife and Others in Forced Labor of Young West African Women

NEWARK – A Togolese man pleaded guilty today in connection with the forced labor of dozens of young West African females working in hair braiding salons in Newark and East Orange, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr. announced.

Lassissi Afolabi, 46, who was residing in East Orange, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Jose L. Linares to one count of conspiring with other individuals, including his former wife, to commit forced labor, trafficking with respect to forced labor, and holding their visas and identification; one count of forced labor with aggravated sexual abuse; and one count of traveling with intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct with a minor. Afolabi has been held without bail since his arrest on Sept. 6, 2007. Judge Linares continued the defendant's detention and scheduled sentencing for Dec 8.

“These young women were forced to work for nothing to satisfy the greedy motives of the defendants,” said Marra. “The dignity and basic human rights of the victims clearly meant nothing to this defendant or his co-conspirators.”

“ICE Special Agents, working with the U.S. Department of Labor, and other law enforcement partners, will not tolerate anyone who exploits or victimizes innocent people looking for a better life in the United States,” said Peter T. Edge, Special Agent in Charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Newark. “ICE is committed to identifying, dismantling, and disrupting the international criminal organizations that are involved in any form of involuntary servitude.”

At his plea hearing, Afolabi admitted that from October 2002 through September 2007, he engaged in a conspiracy to obtain the forced labor of a number of women whom his wife, Akouavi Kpade Afolabi, had brought over from Togo with fraudulent visas. Once the young women entered the United States, Afolabi and his wife required them to work at hair braiding salons for up to fourteen hours per day, six or seven days a week. The women were also required to turn over all of their earnings, including their tips, to the defendants. The defendants did not allow the young women to keep their passports or identification; to speak with their families outside of the defendants’ presence; or to make any outside friends. The women were rarely permitted to leave Afolabi’s residence other than to work. When a girl broke a rule she was punished, often physically by Afolabi or his wife. Afolabi also admitted to forcing at least one girl to have sex with him during the course of the conspiracy and to taking one girl, who was under the age of 18, from New Jersey to North Carolina for the purpose of engaging in sex with her.

The trial of the remaining defendant, Akouavi Kpade Afolabi, is scheduled to commence on Sept. 14, 2009.

The forced labor charge carries a statutory maximum penalty of life in prison. The charge of traveling with intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct with a minor carries a maximum penalty of 30 years in prison. The conspiracy count carries a maximum penalty of 5 years in prison. Additionally, Afolabi faces a maximum fine of \$250,000 or twice the aggregate loss to the victims or gain to the defendant, and mandatory restitution to the victims.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Linares will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Marra credited Special Agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Newark Division, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Peter T. Edge, as well as agents

of the Department of Labor, Customs and Border Protection, and the U.S. Department of State.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Shana W. Chen and Nancy Hoppock of the Criminal Division in Newark.

Defense Attorney: John P. McGovern, Esq., Newark.

Department of Justice
Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, August 25, 2009

Five Arrested in Houston Sex Trafficking Case

Four men and one woman have been arrested on charges of conspiracy and sex trafficking of children, as well as forcing and coercing adults to engage in commercial sex acts.

The charges against the six total defendants represent the single-largest domestic sex trafficking case ever prosecuted in the Southern District of Texas.

"The protection of the innocent and the most vulnerable among us is one of the most important obligations of law enforcement," said Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division Lanny A. Breuer. "Sex trafficking, especially the trafficking of children, is unconscionable, and federal law enforcement is working closely with state and local authorities to fight this most reprehensible sort of exploitation."

"It is a horrible reflection on our society when adults prey on the vulnerabilities of children and reduce them to indentured sex slaves," said U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Texas Tim Johnson. "Whenever and wherever offenses of such a depraved nature occur, our law enforcement community will respond with the sum of our collective prosecutorial resources."

Five of the six defendants were arrested late Monday, Aug. 24, 2009, and early Tuesday, Aug. 25, 2009, in a coordinated effort between federal and local law enforcement with warrants issued following the return of a sealed indictment by a Houston grand jury on Aug. 4, 2009.

The indictment unsealed today charges John Butler, 47; William Hornbeak, 34; Jamine Lake, 27; Andre McDaniels, 39; Kristen Land, 28; all of Houston, and Ronnie Presley, 35, formerly of Houston and currently of Tulsa, Okla., with conspiracy to traffic women and children for the purposes of commercialized sex; sex trafficking of children; sex trafficking by force, fraud and coercion; transportation of minors; transportation; and coercion and enticement.

Upon conviction, each count of sex trafficking and transportation of minors carries a maximum sentence of life in prison. Each count of transportation carries up to 10 years in prison, charges for coercion and enticement carry up to 20 years in prison and conspiracy carries up to five years in prison. All charges carry up to a \$250,000 fine.

Butler, Hornbeak, Lake, McDaniels and Land were arrested in Houston. The government will ask the court to hold all the defendants in federal custody without bond pending trial. Presley is a fugitive and a warrant remains outstanding for his arrest. Anyone with information about Presley's whereabouts is encouraged to contact their local FBI field office, or the Houston FBI Field Office at (713)-693-5000.

According to the unsealed indictment, the defendants allegedly operated commercialized sex businesses often disguised as modeling studios, health spas, massage parlors and bikini bars in Houston, and used sexually oriented publications and Web sites to advertise their illicit business. The criminal enterprise allegedly transported women and minors to and from the Houston area and had ties to Kansas, Nevada, Arizona and Florida. Women and minors as young as 16 were allegedly enticed and coerced into prostitution and were routinely beaten and threatened. The defendants allegedly collected any proceeds the women and minors received as a result of "dates," rendering them dependent upon the defendants for basic necessities.

An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. A defendant is presumed innocent unless convicted through due process of law.

"The defendants are charged with transporting and threatening young women with violence in order to force them into prostitution," Texas Attorney General Greg Abbot said. "A concerted, cooperative effort by state and federal law enforcement is cracking down on the horrific crime of human trafficking – and those who profit from it."

The investigation leading to the charges was conducted by the FBI's Innocence Lost Task Force and the Houston Police Department as part of the Innocence Lost National Initiative. A joint effort of the FBI, the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS) and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the initiative was founded in June 2003 to address criminal enterprises involving the domestic sex trafficking of children. At least one minor was rescued during the course of the investigation. Other minors and several adults have been returned to their families.

"From low-tech methods such as prostituting minors at truck stops, to high-tech methods such as internet advertising, our children are being used as commodities for sale or trade," FBI Special Agent-in-Charge Richard C. Powers said. "Here in Houston we have established unprecedented cooperation among law enforcement agencies that are working together to link cases, make arrests, and rescue children being sold on our streets. We will not allow our city to be a safe haven for this unconscionable activity. If you hear about it, if you suspect it, report it."

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Sherri Zack and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Angela Goodwin of the Southern District of Texas and of the Texas Attorney General's Office and Trial Attorney Michael Yoon of CEOS.

Department of Justice
Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, August 28, 2009

Three Men Charged in Human Trafficking Conspiracy for Exploiting Thai Farm Workers in Hawaii

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department announced the indictment of Alec Souphone Sou and Mike Mankone Sou, owners of Aloun Farm in Hawaii, and Thai labor recruiter William Khoo late yesterday for engaging in a conspiracy to commit forced labor and visa fraud. The charges arise from the defendants' alleged scheme to coerce the labor and services of Thai nationals brought by the defendants to Hawaii to work under the federal agricultural guest worker program. Both Sou defendants are also charged with conspiring to commit document servitude.

The charges set forth in an indictment are merely accusations and the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty. If convicted, Alec and Mike Sou each face maximum sentences of 15 years in prison and William Khoo faces a maximum of 10 years in prison.

Alec Sou, Mike Sou and William Khoo conspired and devised a scheme to obtain the labor of 44 Thai nationals by enticing them to come to Aloun Farms in Hawaii with false promises of lucrative jobs, and then maintaining their labor at the farm through threats of serious economic harm, according to the indictment. They arranged for the Thai workers to pay high recruitment fees, which were financed by debts secured with the workers' family property and homes. Significant portions of these fees went to the defendants themselves, as alleged in the indictment. After arrival at Aloun Farms, the Sou defendants confiscated the Thai nationals' passports and failed to honor the employment contracts. The Sou defendants maintained the Thai nationals' labor by threatening to send them back to Thailand, where they would face serious economic harms created by the debts. The indictment also charges that the defendants engaged in a visa fraud conspiracy by making false representations in documents filed to obtain employment-based visas.

This case is being investigated by the FBI and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement. This case is being prosecuted by trial attorneys Susan French and Kevonne Small of the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division.

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Civil Rights Division



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TUESDAY, AUGUST 18, 2009

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FIVE SENTENCED FOR FORCING GUATEMALAN GIRLS AND WOMEN TO WORK AS PROSTITUTES IN LOS ANGELES

Sentences from 30 to 40 Years in Prison for Sex Trafficking Ring Defendants

WASHINGTON – Five members of an extended family were sentenced to federal prison late yesterday, all receiving lengthy sentences for their roles in an international sex trafficking ring that lured young Guatemalan women and girls to the Los Angeles area and forced them into prostitution, the Justice Department announced.

The five defendants sentenced today – four Guatemalan nationals and one Mexican national – were found guilty in February of various charges, including conspiracy; sex trafficking by force, fraud or coercion; and importation of aliens for purposes of prostitution. Gladys Vasquez Valenzuela, 38, was sentenced to 40 years in prison; Gabriel Mendez, the Mexican national, 35, was sentenced to 35 years; and the other three defendants, Mirna Jeanneth Vasquez Valenzuela, aka Miriam, 28, Maria de los Angeles Vicente, aka Angela, 30, and Maribel Rodriquez Vasquez, 29, were each sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Evidence showed that the defendants intimidated and controlled their victims by threatening to beat them and kill their loved ones in Guatemala if they tried to escape. Some defendants also used witch doctors to threaten the girls that a curse would be placed on them and their families if they tried to escape. At least two of the defendants further restrained the victims by locking them in at night and blocking windows and doors. The defendants also used manipulation of debts, verbal abuse and psychological manipulation to reinforce their control over the victims. The scheme included strict controls over the victims' work schedules and ominous comments about consequences that befell the families of other victims who attempted to escape.

The defendants collected the profits generated by the acts of prostitution the victims were compelled to perform, and maintained control over the proceeds, keeping tens of thousands of dollars while the victims received next to nothing.

"The young girls and women in this case were victimized and exploited in a horrific way, and these sentences should send a stern message to all sex traffickers that they cannot escape justice for such egregious human rights violations," said Loretta King, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "Attorneys in the Civil Rights Division will continue to work with U.S. Attorney's Offices across the nation to stamp out this vicious and intolerable crime, and to seek significant prison sentences for anyone engaging in these despicable acts."

"In this disturbing case, the defendants lured young, uneducated and impoverished women and girls to the United States, where they were forced to work as prostitutes in terrifying conditions," said U.S. Attorney Thomas P. O'Brien for the Central District of California. "There were at least 10 victims who were forced into becoming prostitutes under a variety of threats, as well as actual physical attacks that included rapes."

"These sentences are a stern reminder about the consequences facing those involved in the unconscionable practice of human trafficking," said Robert Schoch, special agent in charge for the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Investigations in Los Angeles. "While we can't erase the suffering these young women experienced, by aggressively investigating and prosecuting these cases, ICE and the other members of the Los Angeles Human Trafficking Task Force are ensuring that those involved in schemes like this pay a significant price for the pain they cause."

Four additional defendants have pleaded guilty for their role in the scheme. Flor Morales Sanchez was sentenced in May to two years in prison; Pablo Bonifacio was sentenced last November to 33 months in prison; Albertina Vasquez Valenzeula, also known as Cristina, was sentenced in February to 33 months in prison. The final defendant, Luis Vicente Vasquez, is scheduled to be sentenced on Thursday.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Cheryl O'Connor Murphy, Curtis A. Kin, Anthony J. Lewis, Sara J. Heidel and Special Litigation Counsel Andrew J. Kline from the Civil Rights Division. The case was investigated by the FBI, ICE and the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Inspector General.

Department of Justice
Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, July 30, 2009

Key Member of Atlanta Human Trafficking Ring Pleads Guilty to Sex Trafficking Charges
At Least 10 Victims, Including Several Minors, Were Compelled into Prostitution

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department today announced that Juan Cortes-Meza, a Mexican National, pleaded guilty in federal district court in Atlanta to sex trafficking offenses involving young Mexican women and girls. Otto Jaime Larios

Perez, a Guatemalan National, also pleaded guilty today to making a false statement to law enforcement and, thereby, obstructing a human trafficking investigation. Earlier this year, two other defendants charged in the same indictment, Francisco Cortes-Meza and Raul Cortes-Meza, pleaded guilty to sex trafficking offenses.

From Spring 2006 through June 2008, Juan Cortes-Meza, 31, and others charged in the conspiracy recruited and enticed approximately 10 victims to come to the Atlanta area from Mexico to engage in prostitution for the financial benefit of the members of the alleged conspiracy, according to information presented in court. With false promises of better lives, legitimate employment or marriage, Juan Cortes-Meza lured young, impoverished, rural Mexican women and girls with limited education, knowing the victims would actually be compelled into prostitution through a scheme of strict controls and physical violence.

The defendants who brought the victims into the United States used drivers, including defendant Larios Perez, 25, to transport the victims to the locations where they were forced to engage in acts of prostitution. Larios Perez was prosecuted for false statements he made when law enforcement officers stopped him with a victim in his car.

"Human trafficking and forced prostitution deny the victims not only their freedom, but also their dignity, and this sort of abhorrent illegal conduct will not be tolerated. We are committed to combating human trafficking and prosecuting those who exploit vulnerable women and girls for financial benefit," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Loretta King of the Civil Rights Division. "I applaud the many hardworking investigators and attorneys who have toppled this ring and brought its members to justice."

"Human trafficking is modern day slavery that robs individuals of their freedom and can have lasting psychological harm. Compelling women or girls by force, fraud or coercion to engage in commercial sex acts is a serious violation of federal law. This insidious abuse preys upon those who may be vulnerable due to their immigration status, unfamiliarity with this country's legal system or fear law enforcement," said U.S. Attorney David E. Nahmias for the Northern District of Georgia. "Federal laws protect all victims of such heinous crimes whether or not they are citizens. No victim should fear coming forward to report illegal activity and criminal abuse."

Sentencing hearings for defendants Juan Cortes-Meza and Otto Jaime Larios Perez related to the pleas entered today have not yet been set. The sex trafficking offense carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in federal prison. In determining the actual sentence for both defendants, the Court will consider the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which are not binding but provide advisory sentencing ranges.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Assistant U.S. Attorneys Corey Steinberg and Susan Coppedge and Trial Attorney Karima Maloney of the Civil Rights Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit are prosecuting the case.

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Civil Rights Division

Department of Justice
Office of Public Affairs

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From Spring 2006 through June 2008, Juan Cortes-Meza, 31, and others charged in the conspiracy recruited and enticed approximately 10 victims to come to the Atlanta area from Mexico to engage in prostitution for the financial benefit of the members of the alleged conspiracy, according to information presented in court. With false promises of better lives, legitimate employment or marriage, Juan Cortes-Meza lured young, impoverished, rural Mexican women and girls with limited education, knowing the victims would actually be compelled into prostitution through a scheme of strict controls and physical violence.

The defendants who brought the victims into the United States used drivers, including defendant Larios Perez, 25, to transport the victims to the locations where they were forced to engage in acts of prostitution. Larios Perez was prosecuted for false statements he made when law enforcement officers stopped him with a victim in his car.

"Human trafficking and forced prostitution deny the victims not only their freedom, but also their dignity, and this sort of abhorrent illegal conduct will not be tolerated. We are committed to combating human trafficking and prosecuting those who exploit vulnerable women and girls for financial benefit," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Loretta King of the Civil Rights Division. "I applaud the many hardworking investigators and attorneys who have toppled this ring and brought its members to justice."

"Human trafficking is modern day slavery that robs individuals of their freedom and can have lasting psychological harm. Compelling women or girls by force, fraud or coercion to engage in commercial sex acts is a serious violation of federal law. This insidious abuse preys upon those who may be vulnerable due to their immigration status, unfamiliarity with this country's legal system or fear law enforcement," said U.S. Attorney David E. Nahmias for the Northern District of Georgia. "Federal laws protect all victims of such heinous crimes whether or not they are citizens. No victim should fear coming forward to report illegal activity and criminal abuse."

Sentencing hearings for defendants Juan Cortes-Meza and Otto Jaime Larios Perez related to the pleas entered today have not yet been set. The sex trafficking offense carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in federal prison. In determining the actual sentence for both defendants, the Court will consider the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which are not binding but provide advisory sentencing ranges.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Assistant U.S. Attorneys Corey Steinberg and Susan Coppedge and Trial Attorney Karima Maloney of the Civil Rights Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit are prosecuting the case.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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St. Louis Woman Sentenced to 20 Years in Prison on Federal Sex Trafficking Charge

WASHINGTON – A federal judge today sentenced Waquita Wallace to 20 years in prison and five years of supervised release for a federal civil rights charge of sex trafficking by force, fraud or coercion for compelling a young St. Louis woman to commit acts of prostitution, announced Acting Assistant Attorney General Loretta King for the Civil Rights Division and Acting U.S. Attorney Michael W. Reap for the Eastern District of Missouri.

U.S. District Court Judge Carol E. Jackson sentenced Wallace, who had previously pleaded guilty and is the last of three defendants in this case to be sentenced on sex trafficking related charges. April Chaney and Richard Harper were previously sentenced to 60 months and 27 months in prison respectively for their roles in this crime.

"Sex trafficking violates individuals' basic human rights, stripping them of their dignity and freedom," Acting Assistant Attorney General King said. "The damage done to the victim in this case cannot be reversed, but I applaud the investigators and attorneys who brought these defendants to justice and it should send a message that we will continue to vigorously enforce our nation's civil rights laws."

In announcing the plea, Acting Assistant Attorney General King, and Acting U.S. Attorney Reap commended the FBI and the St. Louis Metro Police Department for their work in this cooperative investigation and prosecution. Assistant U.S. Attorney Howard Marcus and Trial Attorney Jim Felte of the Civil Rights Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit prosecuted this case for the government.