

JUSTICE NEWS

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

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Three Indicted in Alleged Conspiracy Involving the Trafficking of Haitian Nationals

WASHINGTON - The Justice Department today announced that Carline Ceneus, Cabioch Bontemps and Willy Edouard have been indicted by a federal grand jury sitting in the Northern District of Florida for engaging in a conspiracy to commit forced labor and visa fraud involving Haitian nationals. Ceneus is also charged with document servitude.

Ceneus, 32, of Miami, and Bontemps, 34, of Gainesville, Fla., have been arrested. Ceneus was detained upon re-entry to the United States. Edouard, 47, of Miami, is considered a fugitive. The three are charged with crimes arising from the alleged scheme to coerce the labor and services of Haitian nationals brought by Ceneus and Edouard to northern Florida to work under the federal agricultural guest worker program.

According to the indictment, Ceneus, Bontemps and Edouard engaged in a conspiracy and devised a scheme to obtain the labor of 34 Haitian nationals by enticing them to come to the Gainesville area to pick beans and peas with false promises of lucrative jobs over three years culminating in permanent residency. The three defendants then maintained the victims' labor and services through threats of serious harm, according to the indictment. Ceneus and Edouard arranged for the workers to pay substantial recruitment fees, procured by loans provided by loan sharks and often secured by the victims' property. After arrival in the United States, the defendants confiscated the victims' passports and failed to honor the promised terms of employment. The defendants kept the Haitian nationals in their service by threatening to report them to law enforcement and have them deported or sent home to face their large unpaid debts. The indictment also charges that the defendants engaged in visa fraud by making false statements in documents filed with the U.S. Department of Labor to procure H2A guest worker visas.

The charges set forth in an indictment are merely accusations and the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty. If convicted, Ceneus faces a maximum sentence of 25 years and Edouard and Cabioch each face 10 years in prison.

This case is being investigated by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General - Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Alachua County, Fla., Sheriff's Department. The case is being prosecuted by trial attorney Susan French of the Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit of the Civil Rights Division, Criminal Section, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Frank Williams of the Northern District of Florida.

Numerous non-governmental organizations have provided services to the victims and include: Alachua County Victim Services and Rape Crisis Center; Alachua County Housing Authority; Gainesville Harvest; Alachua County Health Department; Trinity United Methodist Church; Child Advocacy Center of Gainesville; United Way; St. Francis House; Peaceful Paths; Florida Rural Legal Services (Ft. Myers, Fla.); Florida Freedom Partnership (Miami); and World Relief (Jacksonville, Fla.).

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Civil Rights Division