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Micronesian Couple Pleads Guilty in Washington to Withholding Passport in Connection with Human Trafficking Violations

TACOMA, Wash.– Edk Kenit, 29, and Choimina Lukas, 31, a Micronesian couple living in Longview, Wash., pleaded guilty today to document servitude in connection with a scheme to compel the labor of an 18-year-old woman, also from Micronesia. They each face a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a fine of up to $250,000.

Kenit and Lukas admitted in federal court in the Western District of Washington that in March 2010 they recruited the victim to travel from Micronesia to be their domestic servant and arranged for her passport and travel to the United States. Immediately upon her arrival the defendants took control of the victim's passport as part of their scheme to compel the victim to work as their domestic servant, providing full-time childcare, cooking and cleaning services without compensation. Kenit and Lukas also admitted that they obtained a Social Security card in the victim's name which they concealed from her. The defendants then caused the victim to obtain full-time employment at a local chicken processing plant and required that the victim cash her pay checks and give the earnings to them. This employment lasted for five months and was in addition to the domestic services the victim continued to provide. Kenit and Lukas admitted that throughout the scheme they isolated the victim by not permitting her to have friends, go out of the house unmonitored, or participate in social gatherings unrelated to family activities. The entire scheme lasted nearly one year before the victim escaped.

"The defendants' exploitation of a vulnerable young woman is intolerable," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "Human trafficking is a scourge and the Justice Department will continue to vigorously prosecute persons who engage in such conduct."

"We will continue to target human traffickers, whether they be in our rural communities or our larger metropolitan areas," said U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Washington Jenny A. Durkan. "I commend the citizens who acted to assist this young victim, and the dedicated law enforcement officers who are leading the way to stop this terrible type of exploitation."

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This case was investigated by Homeland Security Investigations, the Seattle Police Department High Risk Victims Unit and the Longview Police Department. Law enforcement received critical help from non-governmental organizations which specialize in providing services to victims of crime. The case is being prosecuted jointly by Assistant U.S. Attorney Ye-Ting Woo in the Western District of Washington and Trial Attorney Daniel Weiss of the Civil Rights Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit.

11-999 Civil Rights Division

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