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News Releases

June 22, 2010 

US citizen pleads guilty in Cambodian marriage fraud scheme *Traveled to Cambodia to marry a Cambodian national who is now a fugitive*

LOUISVILLE, Ky. - A U.S. citizen, who was paid to engage in a phony marriage with a Cambodian national to evade immigration laws, pleaded guilty Tuesday in federal court. The guilty plea resulted from an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Justin Michael Martin, 25, of Georgetown, Ky., pleaded guilty June 22 in the Western District of Kentucky to conspiracy to commit marriage fraud and marriage fraud.

Martin admitted that between Jan. 1, 2000 and April 7, 2010, he knowingly reached an agreement with Yota Em, Phearoun Peter Em, aka Sophea Lim, and Michael Chanthou Chin to knowingly enter into a marriage to evade U.S. immigration laws. Martin admitted that Phearoun Peter Em drove Martin to a U.S. Post Office in Lexington to apply for a U.S. passport, and that Phearoun Peter Em paid the passport application fee.

On June 17, 2004, Michael Chanthou Chin drove Martin and others to the Louisville airport. In exchange for a fee, Martin, Phearoun Peter Em, and others traveled from Kentucky to Cambodia. Once in Cambodia, Martin met with Cambodian national Yota Em and agreed to marry her to evade the immigration laws of the United States.

Photographs were taken of Martin and Yota Em during an engagement ceremony on June 25, 2004, and at other locations in Cambodia. While in Cambodia, members of the conspiracy paid for Martin's lodging, food, transportation, sexual services from a Cambodian female, and other expenses.

On June 27, 2004, Martin returned to the United States and was met at the airport by Michael Chanthou Chin. Thereafter, certain immigration forms were completed by Martin and Yota Em, which falsely

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represented the marriage as genuine.

On Sept. 27, 2005, Yota Em entered the United States using a K-1 (fiancée) visa. On March 5, 2007, Yota Em and Martin participated in a civil marriage ceremony in Lexington, knowing that the marriage was not entered into in good faith, was in exchange for something of value, and that the purpose of the marriage ceremony was to enable Yota Em to obtain U.S. permanent resident status in the United States. Phearoun Peter Em and Michael Chanthou Chin served as witnesses at the civil marriage ceremony.

Martin and Yota Em subsequently participated in a marriage interview with immigration officials in Louisville and falsely claimed that they married in good faith. Phearoun Peter Em acted as an interpreter for Yota Em. On June 30, 2009, Martin and Yota Em were divorced. The marriage between Martin and Yota Em was fraudulent and was entered into solely to evade U.S. immigration laws. Martin admitted that he was paid about \$7,000 for participating in the marriage fraud scheme.

Defendant Yota Em is currently a fugitive. Anyone with information about her whereabouts should call 1-866-DHS-2ICE.

The maximum potential penalties for Martin are 10 years' imprisonment, a \$500,000 fine, and supervised release for a period of six years.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Ann Claire Phillips, Western District of Kentucky, is prosecuting the case.

For more information, visit www.ice.gov.

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

ICE is a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities. For more information, visit www.ICE.gov. To report suspicious activity, call 1-866-347-2423.

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