

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

News Releases

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Third individual arrested in alleged conspiracy to traffic Haitian nationals

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. - The third individual indicted for conspiracy to commit human trafficking offenses involving Haitian nationals was arrested in Miami on Thursday.

The arrest of Willy Edouard, 47, follows a four-count indictment on June 22 by a federal grand jury in the Northern District of Florida that charged him and two others with forced labor and conspiracy, visa fraud, holding documents and conspiracy, following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) special agents in Jacksonville and Miami and other state, local and federal agencies.

Edouard and Carline Ceneus, 32, both of Miami, and Cabioch Bontemps, 34, of Gainesville, Fla., were charged with crimes arising from an 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. Ceneus was also charged with taking the victims' travel and identity documents.

"Targeting human traffickers is a top priority for ICE," said Susan McCormick, ICE special agent in charge of the Office of HSI in Tampa. "Those who are motivated by greed to prey on people have a callous disregard for the value of human life. That is why ICE will continue to aggressively investigate those involved in this kind of criminal activity."

On July 1, ICE special agents in Miami arrested Ceneus after she arrived from Haiti at Miami International Airport. Bontemps was arrested July 6 in Gainesville.

Edouard had been considered a fugitive when he was arrested Thursday by the U.S. Marshal's Service.

If convicted, Ceneus faces a maximum sentence of 25 years and Edouard and Cabioch each face 10 years in

prison.

"Human trafficking denies individuals their freedom and their dignity. Those who prey on the most vulnerable through force, fraud or coercion will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law," said Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division Thomas E. Perez. "The Civil Rights Division will continue to work with DHS, law enforcement agencies across the globe, and victim assistance organizations to vindicate the rights of victims, bring traffickers to justice and dismantle human trafficking networks."

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 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.

This case is being investigated by ICE; the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; and the Alachua County, Fla., Sheriff's Office.

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 in Fort Myers, Fla; Florida Freedom Partnership in Miami; and World Relief in Jacksonville.

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Department of Homeland Security.

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