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Uzbek Man Sentenced for Role in Multi-National Racketeering and Forced Labor Enterprise

WASHINGTON – An Uzbek national was sentenced today for his role as the leader of a illicit enterprise that engaged in numerous criminal activities including forced labor, fraud in foreign labor contracting, visa fraud, mail fraud, identity theft, tax evasion and money laundering, the Department of Justice announced. Abrorkhodja Askarkhodjaev was sentenced to 12 years in prison and three years of supervised release, and was ordered to pay \$172,000 in restitution to the foreign worker fraud and forced labor victims in addition to restitution for harm caused by other aspects of the criminal enterprise. Askarkhodjaev pleaded guilty in October 2010, to racketeering conspiracy, fraud in foreign labor contracting, evasion of corporate employment tax and identity theft.

As leader of this multi-national criminal enterprise, whose members included nationals of Uzbekistan, Moldova and the United States, Askarkhodjaev arranged for the recruitment and exploitation of dozens of workers from Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines and elsewhere, many of whom were recruited with false promises concerning the terms, conditions and nature of their employment. Once in the United States, the workers were held in overcrowded apartments and compelled into service and hospitality jobs in as many as 14 states. Members of the criminal enterprise withheld much of the victims' earnings and threatened them with deportation and financial penalties if they refused to comply with the defendants' demands.

“The defendant directed a criminal organization that, out of pure greed, exploited the hopes and dreams of scores of foreign workers, degrading them through threats and deceit,” said Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division Thomas E. Perez. “The Department of Justice will continue to vigorously prosecute these cases and dismantle criminal networks that prey on vulnerable victims.”

“This case was the first in the country in which forced labor trafficking was charged as part of a Racketeer Influenced

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and Corrupt Organizations Act, or RICO, conspiracy,” said U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Missouri Beth Phillips. “Hundreds of illegal aliens working in 14 states were victims of modern-day slavery, including employees at hotels in the Kansas City, Mo., area and in Branson, Mo.”

Co-defendants Kristin Dougherty, Ilkham Fazilov, Viorel Simon, Nodirbek Abdollayev, Jakhongir Kakhkarov, Alexandru Frumusache and Abdulkakar Azizkhodjaev were previously sentenced for their respective roles in this criminal enterprise. Dougherty was convicted of racketeering, racketeering conspiracy and wire fraud, and was sentenced to 60 months in prison. Fazilov was convicted of racketeering conspiracy and was sentenced to 41 months in prison. Simon was convicted of racketeering conspiracy and fraud in foreign labor contracting, and was sentenced to 25 months in prison. Abdollayev was convicted of racketeering and was sentenced to 21 months in prison. Kakhkarov and Azizkhodjaev were convicted of racketeering conspiracy and misprision of a felony respectively, and both were sentenced to time served. Andrew Cole, who was convicted of racketeering conspiracy and fraud in foreign labor contracting, is scheduled to be sentenced on May 10, 2011.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney William L. Meiners, Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Trey Alford and Deputy Chief Jim Felte of the Civil Rights Division. It was investigated by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Homeland Security Investigations, the FBI, the U.S. Department of Labor- Office of the Inspector General, the Internal Revenue Service- Criminal Investigations, the Kansas Department of Revenue- Criminal Investigations, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Independence, Mo., Police Department in conjunction with the Human Trafficking Rescue Project.

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Civil Rights Division