

JUSTICE NEWS

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Georgia Couple Pleads Guilty to Human Trafficking Charges

WASHINGTON – Juna Gwedolyn Babb, 56, and Michael J. Babb, 55, both of Ellenwood, Ga., pleaded guilty today in federal court to felony offenses related to a scheme to compel the labor of a young woman from the Kingdom of Swaziland in southern Africa, announced the Department of Justice.

“Schemes like this one target the most vulnerable in our society,” said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “The department is committed to prosecuting individuals who engage in acts that exploit individuals who wish to work in our country.”

“This case reminds us that modern day slavery is occurring in our communities,” said U.S. Attorney Sally Quillian Yates. “This young woman believed that she was only traveling to the United States for a brief visit to help with a wedding. Instead, she was compelled to labor for the defendants for more than two years. It is especially disturbing that the victim was exploited by a minister and his wife.”

“Human trafficking, while taking on many forms, consists primarily of those who prey on the vulnerabilities of others for personal gain,” said FBI Special Agent in Charge Brian D. Lamkin. “That was, in fact, the case in this matter as a young woman from Swaziland was being forced into labor and was unsure of who to turn to for help. The FBI continues to aggressively pursue all allegations of human trafficking matters and is proud of the role that it played in bringing this case to a successful conclusion.”

“Few crimes are more shocking than the trafficking of human beings in this country,” said Brock Nicholson, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) Office of Investigations in Atlanta. “No one should have to live in a world of isolation and forced servitude. Together with our federal, state and local partners,

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ICE Homeland Security Investigations is committed to protecting those who cannot protect themselves.”

According to the indictment and information presented in court, in or about March 2005, Juna Babb, while visiting the Kingdom of Swaziland, invited the victim, then a 29 year-old cook, to travel to the United States to cater for a family wedding. In fact, there was no wedding, and Juna Babb instead intended to harbor the woman in the United States and compel her to work as a housekeeper in her home for little or no pay. Subsequently, upon the victim’s arrival at the defendant’s home in Ellenwood, Juna Babb concealed her from detection by law enforcement while compelling her housekeeping services from in or about June 2005, through in or about February 2007. During this time, Juna Babb also threatened the victim over the debt she owed for her travel to the United States, and with arrest and deportation because she was in the United States illegally.

Michael Babb, a minister, knew of his wife’s harboring of the victim, as well as the fact that Juna Babb was compelling the victim’s labor. However, Michael Babb failed to notify an authority of the United States as soon as possible of the alien harboring, and affirmatively concealed his wife’s crime by denying that the victim worked as the defendants’ housekeeper to special agents of the FBI.

Juna Babb pleaded guilty to the offense of harboring an alien for financial gain, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. Michael Babb pleaded guilty to the offense of misprision of a felony for concealing his wife’s criminal conduct and for lying to federal agents. This offense carries a maximum penalty of three years in prison. The defendants each agreed to pay \$25,000 in restitution to the victim for her unpaid labor.

This case was investigated by the FBI and ICE. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Richard Moultrie Jr. and Stephanie Gabay-Smith, and Deputy Chief Karima Maloney and Trial Attorney Nicole Lee Ndumele of the Civil Rights Division.

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Civil Rights Division