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News Releases

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Los Angeles-area immigration consultants charged in asylum fraud scheme Men allegedly filed bogus asylum applications for hundreds of Chinese aliens on religious grounds

LOS ANGELES - The owner of a Los Angeles-area immigration consulting business and one of his employees are expected to make their initial appearance in federal court Thursday for their alleged role in a scheme involving hundreds of Chinese nationals who sought asylum in the United States based upon phony claims of religious persecution.

Haoren Ma, 47, of San Gabriel, Calif., owner of New Arrival Immigration Service, and Minghan Dong, 55, of San Gabriel, Calif., an employee of Ma's, were taken into custody Wednesday afternoon by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) agents. Ma was arrested at his San Gabriel residence. Dong was taken into custody at New Arrival's San Gabriel office.

The two men are charged in a criminal complaint filed in U.S. District Court with immigration benefit fraud and failing to disclose their role as preparers on the asylum applications. The charges carry a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison.

According to the case affidavit, Ma and Dong charged from \$3,500 to \$6,500 to prepare and file the fraudulent asylum applications. In those filings, the defendants claimed their Chinese clients fled China after being persecuted for their Christian beliefs. That, despite the fact two of the asylum applicants whose cases are cited in the affidavit told the defendants they were Buddhists.

"The brazen abuse of our country's generous asylum laws will not be tolerated," said Claude Arnold, special agent in charge for ICE HSI in Los Angeles. "As a country, we're committed to providing refuge for those fleeing persecution, but there will be no such protections for people who exploit this system for profit and put our nation's security at risk in the process."

Suspicions about New Arrival Immigration Service first arose in January 2009 after U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers at a Southern California mail facility intercepted a package containing a stuffed animal with five fraudulent Chinese passports concealed inside. The package was being shipped to an address used as a mail drop by New Arrival Immigration Service.

As the investigation unfolded, ICE HSI worked closely with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service's Fraud Detection and National Security Unit in Anaheim, Calif., to identify potentially fraudulent asylum applications submitted by the defendants.

As part of Wednesday's enforcement action, ICE HSI agents executed federal search warrants at New Arrival Immigration Service's office on East Valley Blvd. and at a neighboring business also linked to the scheme, Top Communication and Job Employment. During the search of the offices, investigators seized stacks of partially completed asylum applications, counterfeit Chinese consular and embassy embossing seals, financial records and counterfeit identity documents.

Over the course of the investigation, HSI agents reviewed dozens of asylum applications prepared by the defendants. The affidavit notes many of those applications contained nearly identical accounts of purported persecution, including descriptions of underground church meetings that led to the applicant's arrest and torture by Chinese authorities. The affidavit goes on to describe how the defendants provided their clients with detailed written materials and audio tapes on Christianity to help them prepare for their asylum interviews. One of the DVDs furnished to a confidential informant posing as an asylum seeker was labeled "Jesus 1."

Based upon queries of databases maintained by the immigration courts, ICE HSI investigators have linked the defendants to more than 800 asylum applications filed since 2000, making it one of the largest asylum fraud cases uncovered in the Los Angeles area in recent years.

"Our fraud detection officers work collaboratively with ICE HSI to investigate fraudulent conduct that jeopardizes the integrity of our immigration system," said Irene Martin, acting district director for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in Los Angeles. "This case is a great example of the success our collaboration can achieve."

ICE HSI's investigation into the fraud scheme is continuing. Agents are seeking to identify others who were complicit in the scheme, including any aliens who may have illegally obtained asylum as a result.

A criminal complaint contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed to be innocent until and unless proven guilty in court.

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