

PRESS RELEASE

Suburban Chicago Couple Plead Guilty to Child Labor Trafficking and Are Sentenced to More Than Six Years in Federal Prison

Friday, April 28, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Illinois

CHICAGO — Two Aurora residents have pleaded guilty to two counts each of forced labor and have been sentenced to six and a half years in prison by a federal judge in Chicago.

Per their plea agreements, between February 2019 and February 2020, SANTOS TEODORO AC-SALAZAR, 27, and OLGA CHOC LAJ, 34, who are both Guatemalan citizens, conspired to unlawfully enter the United States with two children who were not their own in order to more easily be allowed entry into the United States and to avoid prolonged detention by U.S. immigration authorities. Once in the United States, Ac-Salazar and Choc Laj harbored the two children (ages 15 and 10 at the time) in a residence in Aurora by, among other things, failing to enroll the children in school, prohibiting them from leaving the residence except in limited circumstances, and instructing them to provide false information to third parties, including law enforcement authorities. Ac-Salazar and Choc Laj also forced the two children to work as their domestic servants and childcare providers and would physically strike and threaten to strike the children if the children did not do as they were told. Ac-Salazar and Choc Laj also forced the older child to work various paying jobs outside the Aurora residence and took nearly all of the earnings from the jobs the child worked.

U.S. District Court Judge Sara L. Ellis imposed the 78-month sentence, with a time served credit of 8-months, for Choc Laj on January 27, 2023, and imposed the identical sentence to Ac-Salazar on April 25, 2023. In addition to the 78-month prison sentence, the Court also ordered Ac-Salazar and Choc Laj to pay \$98,364 in restitution to the victims.

The sentences are announced by Morris Pasqual, Acting United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; Sean Fitzgerald, Special Agent-in-Charge of [the Chicago Office of Homeland Security Investigations](#); and Irene Lindow, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, Great Lakes Region. Substantial assistance in the investigation has been provided by the Kane County State's Attorney's Office, the Aurora Police Department, and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Prashant Kolluri.

"This case outlines the extent to which many will go in order to enter and stay within this country, and the prevalence of child trafficking and labor trafficking occurring throughout our country on a daily basis" said Acting U.S. Attorney Pasqual. "The abuses suffered by the victims in this case are unforgivable. Our Office remains committed to investigating and prosecuting those who engage in all forms of trafficking and forced labor, and to bringing justice to the victims in these cases".

"Those responsible for committing these heinous crimes sought to benefit financially by abusing the most vulnerable members of our community," said HSI Chicago Special Agent in Charge Sean Fitzgerald. "Homeland Security Investigations will continue to work with our partners to prioritize the safety of children across the state of Illinois and beyond."

"Santos Teodoro Ac-Salazar and Olga Choc Laj trafficked two children who they forced to work for them against their will. We are committed to working with our law enforcement partners to investigate those who engage in labor trafficking and involuntary servitude, particularly when children are involved," said Irene Lindow, Special Agent in Charge, Great Lakes Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

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Attachments

[plea agreement choc laj.pdf](#) [PDF, 1020 KB]

[plea agreement ac-salazar.pdf](#) [PDF, 1 MB]

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