

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Florida

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**U.S. Attorney Wifredo Ferrer Speaks About Human
Trafficking in Washington, DC to Commemorate National
Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month**

As part of National Slavery & Human Trafficking Prevention Month, Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch yesterday announced the Justice Department's National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking (National Strategy), as required by the 2015 Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act. U.S. Attorney for the Southern District Florida Wifredo A. Ferrer joined Attorney General Lynch for her announcement regarding the National Strategy and participated in a panel discussion about human trafficking.

"The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida is honored to have been selected as a participating member of the Justice Department's Anti-Trafficking Coordination Teams and the Federal South Florida Human Trafficking Task Force," stated U.S. Attorney Wifredo A. Ferrer. "These invaluable partnerships have offered the survivors assistance in connection with hard-fought criminal prosecutions and protected others from falling victim to modern-day slavery and trafficking schemes. Only through our ongoing collaboration, expanded partnerships and the implementation of prevention and enforcement strategies can we eradicate the human trafficking problem. Until then, we will continue to stand up as the outspoken voice on behalf of the victimized and against the accused, in order to hold those accountable in federal court who use fraud, force or other illicit means to victimize others. But, we cannot do this important work – alone. We rely on the members of our diverse community to continue to raise public awareness and report suspected trafficking."

Since being appointed as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida in 2010, Wifredo A. Ferrer has made the identification and prosecution of human traffickers a priority for the Office. The Special Prosecution's Section of the U.S. Attorney's Office focuses on the protection of some of the most vulnerable segments of our diverse population. The Section has helped to oversee the district's Human Trafficking and Project Safe Childhood Programs (PSC), and the Office's Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) Program, while prosecuting cases involving victims of violent crimes (resulting in death or serious bodily injury), human trafficking, child exploitation, and other criminal offenses. 2010, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida has prosecuted 84 offenders in 50 human trafficking cases. These cases collectively involved the victimization of more than 70 survivors of human trafficking.

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Justice selected the Southern District of Florida as one of six Phase I Pilot Anti-Trafficking Coordination Teams (ACTeams) convened through an interagency collaboration of the Departments of Justice, Labor and Homeland Security to develop high-impact federal human trafficking investigations and

prosecutions involving forced labor, international sex trafficking and sex trafficking of adults by force, fraud and coercion.

The Federal South Florida Human Trafficking Task Force, led by the U.S. Attorney's Office and Homeland Security Investigations, works to increase public awareness, rescue victims, and prosecute traffickers. The Task Force is composed of federal agencies including, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (specifically its Crimes Against Children Task Force), State Department's Diplomatic Security Service, U.S. Department of Labor and Internal Revenue Service. Many state and local law enforcement entities in South Florida, such as the Miami-Dade Police Department and Broward County Sheriff's Office, are supportive task force members. Additionally, the Task Force partners with non-law enforcement entities, including the Florida Department of Children and Families, service providers, victim advocates, faith-based organizations, academic representatives and community members. In 2016, the Task Force included more than 120 non-law enforcement members. Last year alone, ACTeam and Task Force members participated in more than 140 human trafficking community outreach events.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida and its ACTeam is fully committed to using proactive means to combat labor, human and sex trafficking schemes. Prior to 2011, most of the human trafficking prosecutions handled by the U.S. Attorney's Office in South Florida involved the trafficking of minor victims. Presently, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida prosecutes more human trafficking cases involving adult survivors than ever before. The U.S. Attorney's Office has also increased the number of human trafficking cases prosecuted in recent years.

The following are a few of the notable prosecutions that resulted from the district's anti-trafficking collaboration:

1. **Southern District Handles First Sex Trafficking by Fraud Prosecution**

In 2011, **Lavont Flanders** and **Emerson Callum** were charged with sex trafficking by fraud, among other charges (Case No. 11-CR-20557-KMM). The defendants falsely and fraudulently lured women to Miami for supposed modeling auditions. Once the women arrived, they were provided with a drink that, unbeknownst to the victims, had been laced with Xanax. The women were then filmed engaged in sexual acts with Callum, who owned an adult pornography business. The victims had no idea that the defendants subsequently sold the video footage for profit. Both defendants were convicted of all criminal charges and sentenced to life in prison.

1. **The Southern District Has Obtained Significant Victim Restitution Orders**

In **United States v. Israel Cortes-Morales, et al.**, Case No. 11-CR-20005-DPG, the defendants pled guilty to participating in a human trafficking conspiracy. A Miami federal judge ordered the defendants to pay \$1.2 million in restitution to the five sex trafficking victims.

Thereafter, in another human trafficking case, **Rafael Alberto Cadena-Sosa**, a Mexican national, was sentenced in West Palm Beach to 15 years in prison and ordered

to pay \$1,261,563 in victim restitution for his participation in a family run sex trafficking organization (Case No. 98-CR-14015-JEM). Cadena-Sosa pleaded guilty and admitted that he, along with other family members, approached women and girls in Mexico, as young as 14 years of age, and lured them into the U.S. using false promises of legitimate jobs. The trafficking ring imposed a smuggling debt and used brutal violence and threats to compel the victims to engage in prostitution.

1. **Southern District Prosecuted First Sex Trafficking Case in Country Based on Extraterritorial Jurisdiction**

In 2014, **Damion St. Patrick Baston**, a native of Jamaica, was sentenced to 27 years in prison after having been convicted at trial of trafficking several women through Miami, Australia and the Middle East for the purpose of prostitution. (Case No. 13-CR-20914-CMA). Baston was also ordered to pay \$499,270.00 in restitution to the victims. This was the first case in the country to charge the extraterritorial provision of our anti-trafficking laws and it has paved the way for other such prosecutions.

1. **First Prosecution in South Florida Involving Farm Workers**

In October 2016, **Augustin Mendez** pled guilty to conspiracy to provide and obtain forced labor (Case No. 16-CR-20170-RNS). Mendez, who was a supervisor of migrant farm workers in the tomato fields of Homestead, Florida, physically assaulted his workers, threatened and intimidated them, kept them in “debt-bondage,” and confiscated their passports and official travel documents, all to maintain control over his workforce. Mendez’s son, **Ever Mendez**, who was also charged in the case, pled guilty to encouraging and inducing illegal aliens to remain and reside in the United States.

1. **Expanded Partnership with U.S. Department of State’s Diplomatic Security Service to Combat Human Trafficking**

This past November, the coordinated efforts of our Task Force and members of our ACTeam, including representatives from the U.S. Diplomatic Security Service, obtained justice for human trafficking victims who traveled to Miami from Kazakhstan. **Jeffrey Jason Cooper**, a Miami Beach resident, was convicted at trial of sex trafficking after he used deception to lure unsuspecting foreign university students into the United States under false pretenses of legitimate summer jobs, only to then advertise the students to customers of his illicit prostitution and erotic massage enterprise (Case No. 16-CR-20345-KMM).

1. **Additional Trafficking Prosecutions**

Some of the recently convicted traffickers also include **Ricky Jermaine Atkins** of Key Largo, a former staff mentor at the Florida Keys Children’s Shelter, and **Sandra Simon** of Homestead (Case No. 14-CR-20895-MGC). While working at the shelter Atkins arranged for two residents, girls aged 15 and 16, to be brought from Tavernier to a hotel in Cutler Bay where Simon supervised their prostitution. Atkins also arranged for one of the minors to have sex with three associates in order to prepare her for prostitution. Simon pled guilty and Atkins was convicted at trial in Miami and is to be sentenced on February 17, 2017.

In another case, **Shaun McKinley** was convicted of sex trafficking following a Fort Lauderdale trial and sentenced to life in prison (Case No. 14-CR-60163-WPD). Within three days of meeting the 28-year-old victim in Hollywood, Florida, McKinley was acting as her pimp and physically assaulting her. The first time that the victim attempted to leave McKinley, he quickly found her, dragged her for blocks by the hair, and punished her by making her strip naked, covering her head with a pillow case, hog-tying her with extension cords and beating her with a board. The victim was taken to a hospital after another beating. A concerned nurse and an alert police officer kept McKinley from subsequently reaching the victim.

The U.S. Attorney's Office continues to work with our law enforcement and community partners to successfully target for prosecution the offenders who perpetuate these illicit and depraved schemes.

Raising awareness, supporting initiatives that prevent human trafficking and bringing justice to those that bring harm to the vulnerable remains a top priority for the U.S. Department of Justice, Attorney General Loretta Lynch and the U.S. Attorney's Office Southern District of Florida. The department's anti-trafficking efforts involve numerous components engaged in a full spectrum of activities: investigations, prosecutions, services for victims, enforcement initiatives to strengthen anti-trafficking partnerships, innovative prevention efforts, capacity-building programs to advance survivor-centered anti-trafficking strategies and grant funding to state, local and tribal authorities and to non-governmental organizations.

In support of our anti-trafficking efforts, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida will be participating in an Anti-Trafficking Consortium Summit at Broward County Community College on January 24-25, 2017. The program is free and will provide training and resources for the legal, law enforcement, medical, and local community regarding issues related to human trafficking. To register for the summit visit www.1HTC.org^[external link]. To learn more about the U.S. Department of Justice's efforts to combat human trafficking visit www.justice.gov/humantrafficking.