

PRESS RELEASE

Foreign National Charged for Visa Fraud Scheme

Friday, August 4, 2023

For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

An indictment charging an Israeli national with leading a visa fraud scheme to facilitate the illegal entry and employment of noncitizens in the United States was unsealed today in the Eastern District of Virginia.

According to court documents, Shai Cohen, 39, allegedly organized, led, and worked with others to recruit and facilitate the illegal entry of Israeli citizens into the United States under false pretenses. Cohen and his co-conspirators allegedly assisted noncitizens in fraudulently obtaining B-1/B-2 tourist/visitor visas by misrepresenting the true purpose of their travel to the United States, which was illegal employment. Cohen and his co-conspirators are alleged to have then assisted the noncitizens with travel to the United States. Upon arrival, the noncitizens were employed at various kiosks owned and operated by Cohen in malls in Virginia and Maryland. The noncitizens who engaged in illegal employment were allegedly primarily compensated for their work by under-the-table cash payments or the transfer of money to stored value payment cards, rather than through a legitimate payroll system. Cohen also allegedly provided housing and transportation for the noncitizens to and from work in the United States.

Cohen was arrested in Israel pursuant to a U.S. request for his extradition. In August, he was extradited to the Eastern District of Virginia.

Cohen is charged with conspiracy to defraud and commit offenses against the United States; bringing aliens to the United States for financial gain; encouraging and inducing aliens to unlawfully come to, enter, and reside in the United States for financial gain; harboring illegal aliens; and money laundering conspiracy. If convicted, he faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite, Jr. of the Justice Department's Criminal Division; U.S. Attorney Jessica D. Aber for the Eastern District of Virginia; Special Agent in Charge Derek W. Gordon of the Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Washington

Field Office; and Acting Special Agent in Charge Troy W. Springer of the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), National Capital Region made the announcement.

The HSI Washington Field Office and DOL-OIG are investigating the case.

Trial Attorney Clayton O'Connor of the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Raizza Ty for the Eastern District of Virginia are prosecuting the case. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs worked with the government of Israel to secure the arrest and extradition of Cohen.

An indictment is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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Components

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