

PRESS RELEASE

Foreign National Pleads Guilty to Role in Immigration Fraud and Money Laundering Scheme

Tuesday, November 7, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Virginia

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – An Israeli national pleaded guilty today to his role in a conspiracy to launder money and facilitate the illegal entry, harboring, and transporting of noncitizens in the United States for the purpose of their employment.

According to court documents, Shai Cohen, 39, admitted to organizing and working with others to recruit and facilitate the illegal entry of Israeli citizens into the United States under false pretenses. From approximately 2011 through December 2013, Cohen and his co-conspirators 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 then assisted the noncitizens in traveling to the United States. Upon arrival, the noncitizens were employed at various kiosks owned and operated by Cohen and his co-conspirators in malls in Virginia and Maryland, despite entering the United States in a visa status that did not allow them to work. The noncitizens who engaged in illegal employment were 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 provided for the noncitizens housing and transportation to and from work in the United States. Cohen and his co-conspirators also made foreign and domestic financial transactions in furtherance of and to promote the criminal scheme.

Cohen pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit offenses against the United States, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison, and one count of conspiracy to launder money, which carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. He is scheduled to be sentenced on January 19, 2024. Actual sentences for federal crimes are

typically less than the maximum penalties. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

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.

Jessica D. Aber, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; Nicole M. Argentieri, Acting Assistant Attorney General of the Justice Department's Criminal Division; Derek W. Gordon, Special Agent in Charge of the Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Washington Field Office; and Troy W. Springer, Special Agent in Charge of the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG), National Capitol Region, made the announcement after Senior U.S. District Judge Claude M. Hilton accepted the plea.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Raizza K. Ty and Trial Attorney Clayton O'Connor of the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section are prosecuting the case.

The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs provided significant assistance in securing Cohen's arrest and extradition from Israel. The Justice Department thanks the government of Israel for making the arrest and extradition of Cohen possible.

A copy of this press release is located on the website of the [U.S. Attorney's Office](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia. Related court documents and information are located on the website of the [District Court](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia or on [PACER](#) by searching for Case No. 1:16-cr-114.

Contact

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