

Foreign National Sentenced for Human Smuggling and Money Laundering Scheme

Friday, January 19, 2024

For Immediate Release

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

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – An Israeli national was sentenced today to two years in prison for his leadership 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, organized and worked 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 at 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 the noncitizens housing and transportation to and from work in the United States. The conspiracy involved the smuggling, transporting, or harboring of at least 25 unlawful foreign nationals. Cohen and his co-conspirators also made foreign and domestic financial transactions in furtherance of and to promote the criminal scheme.

Cohen pleaded guilty on November 7, 2023, to one count of conspiracy to commit offenses against the United States and one count of conspiracy to launder money. Cohen was arrested in Israel pursuant to a U.S. request for his extradition. In August 2023, 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 announced the sentence.

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 worked with the government of Israel to secure the arrest and extradition of Cohen.

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.

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