

PRESS RELEASE

Mexican National Extradited Back to Florida to Face Forced Labor Charges

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For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

Four Co-Defendants Previously Pleaded Guilty for Their Roles in Compelling the Labor of H-2A Visa Recipients Throughout the Southeastern United States

Alexander Villatoro Moreno, also known as "Quichi," 53, made his first appearance in federal court today after the Mexican government recently apprehended and extradited him to the United States. Villatoro Moreno faces four charges, including conspiracy to violate the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, conspiracy to commit forced labor, conspiracy to obstruct proceedings before agencies, and one count of forced labor for conduct alleged to have occurred between September 2015 and December 2017.

According to the indictment, Villatoro Moreno and his co-defendants fraudulently recruited Mexican nationals to lawfully enter the United States to perform seasonal agricultural work, often lying to the victims about how much they would be paid, the hours they would work, the working conditions, and the reimbursement they would receive for paying recruitment fees and other expenses. Villatoro Moreno and his co-defendants then misled the United States to secure valid H-2A visas for the victims.

Once in the United States, Villatoro Moreno and his co-defendants compelled the labor and services of the victims by, among other actions, having the victims engage in long hours of physically demanding agricultural work while paying them far less money for their work than they were entitled to under the law. Villatoro Moreno and his co-defendants also took the victims' passports to prevent them from leaving, warned the victims that family members back in Mexico could get harmed if they did not comply with their demands, and threatened them with arrest and deportation.

When officials began investigating, Villatoro Moreno distributed fake reimbursement receipts to the victims to make it appear that Los Villatoros Harvesting (LVH), the Farm Labor Contractor that Moreno helped manage, was reimbursing the workers for their travel-related expenses.

Villatoro Moreno's four co-defendants previously pleaded guilty in connection with their roles in the scheme. Bladimir Moreno, Alexander Moreno's brother, owned LVH and pleaded guilty in 2022 to conspiracy to violate the RICO Act and conspiracy to commit forced labor. Efrain Cabrera Rodas and Christina Gamez, LVH supervisors, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to violate the RICO Act while Guadalupe Mendes Mendoza, another LVH supervisor, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to obstruct a federal investigation. In 2022, Bladimir Moreno was sentenced to 118 months in prison and ordered to pay over \$175,000 in restitution to the victims while Rodas and Gamez were sentenced to 41 months and 37 months in prison, respectively. Mendoza was also sentenced in 2022 to serve eight months of home detention and a \$5,500 fine to be paid over 24 months of supervised release.

If convicted, Villatoro Moreno faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

The Palm Beach County Human Trafficking Task Force, which includes the FBI, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations and the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office investigated the case. The Task Force received assistance from the Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General, the Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division, the U.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Colorado Legal Services Migrant Farm Worker Division, Legal Aid Services of Oregon Farmworker Program and Indiana Legal Services Worker Rights and Protection Project.

The Government of Mexico, including the Fiscalía General de la República (FGR), provided significant assistance in the extradition of Villatoro Moreno to the United States. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs worked with law enforcement partners in Mexico to secure the arrest and extradition of Villatoro Moreno.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Ilyssa Spergel for the Middle District of Florida and Trial Attorney Matthew Thiman of the Civil Rights Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit are prosecuting the case.

Anyone who has information about human trafficking should report that information to the National Human Trafficking Hotline toll-free at 1-888-373-7888, which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For more information about human trafficking, please visit www.humantraffickinghotline.org. Information on the Justice Department's efforts to combat human trafficking can be found at www.justice.gov/humantrafficking.

An indictment is merely an allegation, and Villatoro Moreno is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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