

PRESS RELEASE

Woburn Men Plead Guilty to Migrant Smuggling Conspiracy

Thursday, November 14, 2024

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts

BOSTON – Father and son owners of two Woburn, Mass. restaurants, Taste of Brazil—Tudo Na Brasa and The Dog House Bar and Grill, have pleaded guilty to conspiring to smuggle migrants into the United States from Brazil. One defendant has also pleaded guilty to money laundering conspiracy.

Jesse James Moraes, 66, and Hugo Giovanni Moraes, 45, both of Woburn, pleaded guilty to conspiring to encourage and induce an alien to come to, enter, and reside in the United States, knowing or in reckless disregard of the fact that such coming to, entry, or residence is or will be in violation of law, for commercial advantage or private financial gain. Jesse Moraes also pleaded guilty to conspiracy to launder the proceeds of the migrant smuggling conspiracy. U.S. District Court Judge Allison D. Burroughs scheduled sentencings for Feb. 11, 2025.

The conspiracy involved recruiting undocumented migrants in Brazil to come to the United States through Mexico without authorization in exchange for fees of between \$12,000 and \$22,000 per person. The migrants were encouraged to make fraudulent claims of asylum and familial relationship (e.g., parent and minor child) in the United States and were given fraudulent information about U.S. points of contact to give to immigration authorities when they were caught in the United States. Once migrants were in the United States, Jesse Moraes and Hugo Moraes helped them secure long term housing, including in apartments owned by relatives of Hugo Moraes. The defendants arranged for some of the migrants to work at Tudo Na Brasa/Taste of Brazil and The Dog House Bar and Grill and paid the migrants either entirely or partly in cash unless and until the migrants obtained identification documents, at which point they would be paid at least partly by check. The defendants encouraged the migrants working for them to obtain false identification documents and referred them to a co-defendant, Marcos Chacon Gil, a/k/a Marquito," to obtain such false identification documents. The co-conspirators agreed that some of the migrants could pay off some of their smuggling fee once they reached the United States, which they did by direct

payment, having their wages withheld, or by collection by relatives and other associates within and outside the United States.

The money laundering conspiracy to which Jesse Moraes pleaded guilty involved transferring funds into and out of the United States with the intent to promote the migrant smuggling conspiracy and conducting financial transactions with the proceeds of the smuggling conspiracy that were designed to conceal the ownership and control of the proceeds.

Members of the public who believe they may be victims of the alleged crimes, or have information or questions about this case, are encouraged to call 888-221-6023, Option 5 or send an email with contact information to USAMA.VictimAssistance@usdoj.gov.

The charge of conspiring to encourage and induce an alien to come to, enter, and reside in the United States, knowing or in reckless disregard of the fact that such coming to, entry, or residence is or will be in violation of law, for commercial advantage or private financial gain, provides for a sentence of up to 10 years in prison per alien smuggled, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charge of money laundering conspiracy provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a fine of \$500,000 or twice the amount involved in the transaction, whichever is greater. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and statutes which govern the determination of a sentence in a criminal case.

Acting United States Attorney Joshua S. Levy; Michael J. Krol, Acting Special Agent in Charge for Homeland Security Investigations in New England; Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge of the Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; Harry Chavis, Jr., Special Agent in Charge of the Internal Revenue Service's Criminal Investigations in Boston; and Woburn Police Chief Robert F. Rufo, Jr., made the announcement today. Valuable assistance in the investigation was provided by the Norwood Police Department. Assistant U.S. Attorneys James D. Herbert, Kelly Lawrence and Samuel R. Feldman of the Criminal Division are prosecuting the case.

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HUMAN SMUGGLING

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