



50 individuals charged in Puerto Rico with allegedly trafficking identities of Puerto Rican US citizens

WASHINGTON — Fifty individuals were charged in an indictment unsealed today in Puerto Rico with conspiracy to commit identification fraud in connection with their alleged roles in a scheme to traffic the identities of Puerto Rican U.S. citizens and corresponding identity documents. The charges are the result of an extensive investigation led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) [Homeland Security Investigations \(HSI\)](#), in partnership with other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.

The charges were announced today by ICE Director John Morton; Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Justice Department's Criminal Division; U.S. Attorney Rosa E. Rodríguez-Vélez for the District of Puerto Rico; Chief Postal Inspector Guy Cottrell of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS); Scott P. Bultrowicz, Director of the U.S. State Department's Diplomatic Security Service (DSS); and Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) Acting Chief Rick Raven.

The one-count indictment was returned by a federal grand jury on Dec. 29, 2011, and unsealed today. Defendants were arrested today in multiple districts throughout the United States and Puerto Rico and will make initial appearances in federal court in the districts in which they were arrested. In addition, law enforcement agents executed searches as part of an ongoing investigation.

"Today's arrests are a reflection of ICE Homeland Security Investigations unrelenting determination to identify and dismantle national smuggling rings engaged in document and identity fraud," said ICE Director Morton. "The conspiracy alleged to be perpetrated by those charged undermines the integrity of our national immigration system. We will continue working with our federal partners to protect our homeland from criminals who have no regard for our nation's safety and security."

"The indictment unsealed today alleges that from April 2009 to December 2011, the defendants operated an extensive black market, identity fraud ring," said Assistant Attorney General Breuer. "The alleged conspiracy stretched across the United States and Puerto Rico, using suppliers, identity brokers and mail and money runners to fill and deliver orders for the personal identifying information and government-issued identity documents of Puerto Rican U.S. citizens. Those willing to buy and sell personal identifying information and documents should take notice of today's actions. The department and our law enforcement partners will not allow this kind of illegal activity to continue."

According to the indictment, from at least April 2009 to December 2011, conspirators in 15 states and Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory, trafficked the identities of Puerto Rican U.S. citizens, corresponding Social Security cards, Puerto Rico birth certificates and other identification documents to undocumented aliens and others residing in the United States.

The indictment alleges that conspirators located in the Savarona area of Caguas, Puerto Rico (Savarona suppliers) obtained the Puerto Rican identities and corresponding identity documents. Conspirators in various locations throughout the United States (identity brokers) solicited customers. The identity brokers allegedly sold Social Security cards and corresponding Puerto Rico birth certificates for prices ranging from \$700 to \$2,500 per set. The indictment alleges that identity brokers ordered the identity documents from Savarona suppliers, on behalf of the customers, by making coded telephone calls, including using terms such as "shirts," "uniforms" or "clothes," to refer to identity documents. Specifically, the brokers asked for "skirts" for female customers and "pants" for male customers in various "sizes," which referred to the ages of the identities sought by the customers.

According to the indictment, the Savarona suppliers generally requested that customers' initial payments be sent by the identity brokers through a money transfer service to persons whose names were provided by the Savarona suppliers. Savarona suppliers allegedly retrieved the payments from the money transfer service and then sent the identity documents to the brokers using express, priority or regular U.S. mail. The indictment alleges that various conspirators sent or received money and mail parcels. The conspirators frequently confirmed sender names and addresses, money transfer control numbers and trafficked identities via text messaging.

According to the indictment, once the identity brokers received the identity documents, they delivered the documents to the customers and obtained second payments. The brokers generally kept the second payments for themselves as profit. Some identity brokers allegedly assumed a Puerto Rican identity themselves, and used that identity in connection with the trafficking operation.

As alleged in the indictment, the customers generally obtained the identity documents to assume the identity of Puerto Rican U.S. citizens and to obtain additional identification documents, such as legitimate state driver's licenses. Some customers allegedly obtained the documents to commit financial fraud and attempted to obtain a U.S. passport.

"From Main Street to Wall Street, identity fraud exacts a devastating toll on American consumers and businesses. U.S. Postal Inspectors will continue to aggressively investigate criminals who use the mail to defraud postal customers," said Chief Postal Inspector Cottrell.

"The Diplomatic Security Service is firmly committed to working with our law enforcement partners to investigate and bring to justice those who commit document trafficking and identity fraud," said Director Bultrowicz of the U.S. State Department's Diplomatic Security Service. "Fraudulently-obtained documents are frequently used to apply for U.S. passports and visas, two of the most coveted travel documents in the world."

"IRS Criminal Investigation has made investigating identity theft a top priority," said Acting Chief Raven of the IRS-CI. "We are committed to working with our law enforcement partners to unravel the money trail of criminal enterprises that defraud government and prey on unwitting victims."

The indictment alleges that various identity brokers were operating in Rockford, Ill.; Indianapolis; DeKalb, Ill.; Columbus and Seymour, Ind.; Aurora, Ill.; Hartford, Conn.; Clewiston, Fla.; Lilburn and Norcross, Ga.; Salisbury, Md.; Columbus, Ohio; Fairfield, Ohio; Dorchester, Mass.; Lawrence, Mass.; Salem, Mass.; Worcester, Mass.; Grand Rapids, Mich.; Nebraska City, Neb.; Elizabeth, N.J.; Burlington, N.C.; Hickory, N.C.; Hazelton, Pa.; Philadelphia; Houston; and Abingdon, Va.

If convicted, each defendant faces a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, as well as forfeiture.

The charges announced today are the result of Operation Island Express, an ongoing, nationally-coordinated investigation led by the ICE HSI Chicago office, in partnership with USPIS, DSS and IRS-CI offices in Chicago. The investigation was also coordinated with the ICE HSI San Juan office. The Illinois Secretary of State Police; Elgin, Ill., Police Department; Seymour, Ind., Police Department; and Indiana State Police provided substantial assistance. The ICE HSI Assistant Attaché office in the Dominican Republic, National Drug Intelligence Center - Document and Media Exploitation Branch and International Organized Crime Intelligence and Operations Center (IOC-2) provided invaluable assistance as well as various ICE, USPIS, DSS and IRS CI offices around the country.

The case is being prosecuted by the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section, with the assistance of the Criminal Division's Asset Forfeiture and Money Laundering Section, and the support of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico. The U.S. Attorneys' Offices in the Northern District of Illinois, Southern District of Indiana and District of Connecticut provided substantial assistance. The U.S. Attorneys' Offices in the Middle District of Florida, Southern District of Florida, Northern District of Georgia, Western District of Kentucky, District of Maryland, District of Massachusetts, Western District of Michigan, District of Nebraska, District of New Jersey, Western District of North Carolina, Southern District of Ohio, Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Middle District of Pennsylvania, Southern District of Texas, Eastern District of Virginia, Southern District of Illinois, Western District of Texas, Middle District of Louisiana and Western District of Virginia also provided invaluable support.

A website will be established to provide information about the case to potential victims and the public. Anyone who believes their identity may have been compromised in relation to this investigation may contact the ICE toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2ICE (1-866-347-2423) and its online tip form at www.ice.gov/tipline. Anyone who may have information about particular crimes in this case should also report it to the [ICE tip line or website](#).

Anyone who believes that they have been a victim of identity theft, or wants information about preventing identity theft, may obtain helpful information and complaint forms on various government websites including the Federal Trade Commission ID Theft Website,

www.ftc.gov/idtheft. Additional resources regarding identity theft can be found at http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/pubs/ID_theft/idtheft.html; <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10064.html>; http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/cyber/identity_theft; and <http://www.irs.gov/privacy/article/0,,id=186436,00.html>.

An indictment is merely a formal accusation. Defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty in a court of law.

<http://content.govdelivery.com/bulletins/gd/USDHSICE-255e38>