



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

News Releases

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5 managers and supervisors at Mambo Seafood indicted for harboring illegal aliens

HOUSTON – Two current managers and three former managers or supervisors of Mambo Seafood were indicted on Wednesday on various charges related to harboring illegal aliens. These indictments were announced by U.S. Attorney José Ángel Moreno, and acting Special Agent in Charge John Connelly with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Houston.

Mambo Seafood is the assumed business name for Connie's Seafood Kitchen Inc. with eight seafood restaurant locations located within the greater Houston metropolitan area, and is headquartered on the 6100 block of Airline Drive in Houston.

A federal grand jury returned a five-count indictment under seal on June 1 and charged the following individuals with conspiracy to encourage and induce aliens to illegally reside in the United States and to harbor the aliens beginning in April 2009 to the present: Operations Manager Joel Moreno, 36; former restaurant managers Alfredo Aguilar Gonzalez, 43, and Alejandro Aguilar Gonzalez, aka Eduardo Martinez, 27; former supervisor Víctor Batz, 49; and current supervisor Romelia Lopez, 26. Each defendant is also charged with one count each of making false statements on employment documents during the existence of the conspiracy.

Following the return of the indictment, arrest warrants were issued for all five defendants. Moreno, Alfredo Gonzalez and Batz were arrested on Wednesday; Lopez was arrested Thursday morning. A warrant for the arrest of Alejandro Gonzalez remains outstanding. With the exception of Alejandro Aguilar Gonzalez, who is an illegal alien from Mexico, all of the other defendants are natural or naturalized U.S. citizens. The indictment was unsealed June 2 regarding all the defendants following the initial appearance of Moreno, Gonzalez and Batz before a U.S. Magistrate Judge. Lopez is expected to make her initial appearance later Thursday or Friday. The court has ordered Moreno, Gonzalez and Batz released on bond pending trial which has been set for Aug. 9 before U.S. District Judge David Hittner.

According to allegation in the indictment, on Dec. 2, 2009, ICE HSI agents conducted a worksite enforcement action at Mambo Seafood's corporate headquarters and two restaurants, one located at on the 6100 block of Airline Drive, and the second on the 10000 block of Long Point Road. Thirty-three illegal alien employees were found and detained by ICE HSI agents, and numerous immigration documents were seized.

Federal law requires that employers hire only U.S. citizens and aliens who are authorized to work in the United States. Employers must verify employment eligibility of anyone hired after Nov. 6, 1986 using the Employment Eligibility Verification Form (I-9). At the time a new employee is hired, employers are further required to ensure that the documents presented by the new employee appear to be genuine and to relate to the individual. The employer must retain the I-9 for three years after the date of hiring, or one year after the date the individual's employment is terminated, whichever is later. Additionally, it is unlawful for a person or entity, after hiring an alien for employment, to continue to employ the alien in the United States knowing the alien is (or has become) no longer authorized to work in the United States.

The indictment alleges that as part of the conspiracy the defendants, as Mambo Seafood managers and supervisors, knowingly sought to employ illegal aliens with little or no regard to the legal status of the workers; they hired many unauthorized non-U.S. citizen aliens for jobs by accepting fraudulently completed I-9 forms; and they allowed alien workers to use multiple social security numbers and identities during the course of employment.

A conviction for conspiring to induce aliens to remain in the country illegally and harboring illegal carries a maximum punishment of 10 years incarceration without parole. Making false statements on employment forms carries a maximum punishment of five years incarceration. Each of the five counts of the indictment are also punishable by maximum fines of \$250,000.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Douglas Davis and Julie Searle, Southern District of Texas, are prosecuting the case.

An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. A defendant is presumed innocent unless convicted through due process of law.