

Two immigration attorneys indicted in visa fraud case

1,000 documents may be involved

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COPLEY NEWS SERVICE

March 2, 2007

LOS ANGELES – A federal grand jury has indicted two attorneys at one of the biggest immigration law firms on the West Coast for allegedly seeking fraudulent visas for foreign nationals, including some of the firm's employees.

The indictments, announced yesterday, follow similar accusations against two other employees of Korenberg, Abramowitz & Feldun, based in the Los Angeles-area community of Sherman Oaks.

Two Southern California employment agencies also have been targeted in the long-running probe by federal immigration officials, prosecutors and the Department of Labor.

Employees of the law firm may have distributed up to 1,000 fraudulent visas, primarily between 2000 and 2003, investigators said.

“The fact that the defendants in this case earned their living practicing immigration law makes the charges particularly disturbing,” said Robert Schoch, a special agent in charge with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The firm – known as ASK Law Group – has an office in San Diego, but investigators said they didn't find illicit activity at the branch in San Diego.

Attorneys for the accused lawyers said they will fight the case.

“There was no criminal intent whatsoever,” said Errol Stambler, who represents Steven Rodriguez. “We're going to trial.”

Rodriguez, a senior associate at the firm, was indicted along with partner Daniel Korenberg on charges of conspiracy, visa fraud and making false statements.

The indictment details several cases in which the lawyers allegedly employed noncitizens as paralegals or legal assistants and then filed improper documents to obtain specialized visas for them – visas reserved for skilled workers, such as systems analysts, programmers and management consultants.

The case began with a tip from a defendant in another case, investigators said, and the investigation involved an undercover federal agent posing as an immigrant seeking a visa.

About 20 visa-seekers from countries including the Philippines, Indonesia, Syria and Egypt cooperated with the government as material witnesses and will have their legal status determined through immigration courts, said Jennifer Silliman, deputy special agent in charge for Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Another partner at the firm, Philip Abramowitz, pleaded guilty to visa fraud and conspiracy last year in a related case, and a supervisory paralegal also pleaded guilty to conspiracy.

Four people associated with a pair of employment agencies, Job Seekers International and Employmasters International, have also pleaded guilty to charges related to the investigation.