



News Releases

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ORLANDO, FL

Brazilian woman convicted of visa fraud conspiracy involving more than 1,000 illegal workers

ORLANDO, Fla. — A federal jury found a Brazilian woman residing in Orlando guilty of alien smuggling and conspiracy to commit alien smuggling and worker visa fraud on Monday, following an investigation that began with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

Rafaela Dutra Toro, 30, faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in federal prison. She was indicted on Jan. 26. Her sentencing hearing has not yet been scheduled.

"The individuals involved in this case orchestrated a very large and very complex visa fraud ring. They took jobs away from U.S. citizens and others who are legally allowed to work in this country by knowingly employing people who were not authorized to work in the United States," said Susan McCormick, special agent in charge of HSI in Tampa. "Through cases like this one, HSI is helping to protect our economy and preserve job opportunities from being lost due to fraud."

Toro is a citizen of Brazil and will be subject to removal from the United States after serving her sentence.

According to evidence presented at trial, Toro worked for VR Services, a large temporary labor staffing company based in Orlando, which supplied temporary labor to numerous businesses in the hotel and hospitality industries throughout Florida and the United States. The scheme allowed Toro and her co-conspirators to set up a permanent foreign labor pool that hired illegal alien workers across the United States in jobs that would

normally have been filled by United States citizens. As part of the conspiracy, Toro and her co-conspirators submitted false documentation to the government and manipulated the H-2B foreign worker visa process. They also submitted fake hotel contract agreements to conceal their activities and falsely reported that U.S. workers had been hired when they had not.

To further the conspiracy, they falsely claimed that no payments had been collected from the alien workers, when in fact the workers had actually paid between \$350 to \$750 each, to be placed on the fraudulent H-2B visa petitions. Through their complex visa fraud and alien smuggling activities, Toro and her co-conspirators supplied foreign workers to more than 100 hotels and allowed more than 1,000 foreign workers to enter and remain in the United States illegally using fraudulently obtained H-2B employment-based visas. An H-2B visa is granted to certain qualified foreign workers seeking temporary employment in the United States.

Four co-conspirators previously pled guilty for their roles in this conspiracy. Wilson and Valeria Barbugli were sentenced in October 2010 to 18 months and 24 months in federal prison, respectively. Their son, Eduardo Dozzi Barbugli, was sentenced in December 2010 to 20 months in federal prison. A fourth co-conspirator, Jose Maria Meza Diaz, will be sentenced later this month.

This case was jointly investigated by the Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force (DBFTF), a multi-agency task force that coordinates investigations into fraudulent immigration documents. The task force includes ICE HSI; the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations; the U.S. Department of State, Diplomatic Security Service; and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Fraud Detection and National Security.

The case was prosecuted by Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephanie E. Gorman.