

Former slaughterhouse manager admits to immigration scheme

Published August 29, 2013

Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa – A former Iowa slaughterhouse manager has admitted to conspiring to harbor and recruit immigrants who entered the country illegally and then fleeing to Israel after the plant was raided in 2008, according to a plea agreement filed Thursday.

Hosam Amara, will plead guilty Friday to one count of conspiring to harbor undocumented immigrants for profit, under terms of the plea deal with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Cedar Rapids. In exchange, prosecutors will dismiss several other counts of harboring immigrants and document fraud returned against him in a 2009 indictment.

Amara had managed the second shift on the poultry side of the Agriprocessors Inc. plant in Postville, which once was the nation's largest kosher slaughterhouse.

The conspiracy charge carries a maximum of 10 years in prison, but federal sentencing guidelines will likely call for a shorter sentence for Amara, 48. His attorney, Mark Fisher of Cedar Rapids, didn't immediately return a phone message.

Amara left the U.S. for Israel weeks after federal agents descended on the plant in May 2008, arresting 389 workers in what was the largest workplace enforcement action at the time. Amara was arrested in 2011 after years as a fugitive, and taken to the U.S. to face the charges in April after unsuccessfully challenging extradition. A Muslim with Israeli citizenship, Amara has been detained since then at the Linn County Jail in Cedar Rapids.

In the plea agreement signed by Amara last week, he admitted that he conspired with Agriprocessors CEO Sholom Rubashkin and other executives for at least five years before the raid to harbor immigrants "knowing and in reckless disregard of the fact" they had come to the U.S. illegally. He also admitted to conspiring to encouraging and inducing them to stay in the U.S.

The agreement says that Amara complained to Rubashkin in 2007 about a shortage of workers after U.S. immigration authorities warned that the plant could no longer accept permanent resident alien cards as identification for workers. Amara encouraged existing foreign workers to tell their family members to illegally come to Postville for work, and they were put on the payroll of a separate company, Hunt Enterprises, to make it appear that they were not working at Agriprocessors.

After the raid, Rubashkin told Amara to get out of the United States, saying, "Just go ahead and leave and forget about everything here" and giving him \$4,000 for plane fare and other expenses, the document states.

Amara's attorney and prosecutors are expected to argue over several issues at his sentencing, which hasn't been scheduled. They include factors such as whether Amara obstructed justice, how many immigrants he harbored, what responsibility he had in the larger conspiracy and what motivated his crime. A judge will weigh those issues in calculating the recommended sentence he faces under federal guidelines.

Prosecutors say another former manager facing charges, Zeev Levi, also fled the country and remains a fugitive. Several others have been prosecuted.

In the most high-profile case, Rubashkin was convicted in 2009 on financial fraud charges and sentenced to 27 years in prison, a sentence his supporters insisted was unfair. Despite a vigorous legal and public relations campaign, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to review the sentence last year.

The raid remains a point of outrage in Postville, a city of 2,000 people that was devastated in its aftermath. Those arrested were bused to the National Cattle Congress in Waterloo for hearings in a makeshift courtroom. Most pleaded guilty to identity theft charges, spent five months in prison and were then deported. Many families were split up for years by the deportations.

Hundreds of people marched in Cedar Rapids in May on the five-year anniversary of the raid, calling for immigration reform that would allow a path to citizenship for those who entered the U.S. illegally. Agriprocessors has filed for bankruptcy and sold the plant, which now operates under new ownership.

<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2013/08/29/former-slaughterhouse-manager-admits-to-immigration-scheme/>