

News Releases

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ALEXANDRIA, VA

Owner and Madame of Korean room salon in Virginia sentenced

ALEXANDRIA, Va. - The owner and the madame of a Korean room salon in Falls Church, Va., were sentenced today for conspiracy to both harbor illegal aliens and to induce illegal aliens to reside in the United States for commercial advantage and private financial gain following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

"This sentencing shows that companies whose business models incorporate the use of illegal alien workers will be held accountable," said John P. Torres, special agent in charge of ICE HSI in Washington, D.C. "ICE HSI will continue to aggressively pursue those who profit by harboring illegal aliens."

Sang Bun Surh, 52, of Falls Church, Va., was sentenced to 30 months in prison, three years of supervised release, and ordered to forfeit \$2 million in illegal proceeds. Young Mi Kim, 41, also of Falls Church was sentenced to 16 months in prison, three years of supervised release, and ordered to forfeit \$2 million in illegal proceeds. Both defendants were also ordered to cooperate in their subsequent removal from the United States.

"This office is committed to the vigorous enforcement of our immigration laws, which are vital to our national security and well-being," said U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia Neil H. MacBride. "We bring these cases to hold employers accountable and ensure that they abide by laws designed to protect both foreign and domestic workers and the citizens of the United States."

On Dec. 2, 2010, the defendants pled guilty to the charges. Young Mi Kim also pled guilty to conspiracy to commit marriage fraud in relation to her fraudulent marriage to a U.S. citizen. According to court documents, "High Society" (also known as "Tomato" and "Tomato Garden") was a Korean karaoke bar/club that advertised as a "room salon," a club containing private rooms where customers, primarily Korean men, consumed liquor. Provocatively dressed Korean female hostesses would serve the drinks to and then drink, flirt, sing, and dance with the customers. A bottle of liquor at High Society/Tomato typically would cost \$300 and customers were required to purchase at least one bottle.

Sang Bun Surh, a/k/a "Chung Madame," who was the owner of High Society/Tomato, directed its operations and was involved in the recruitment of the female hostesses, some directly recruited from the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Young Mi Kim was the primary madame of the club, supervised the female hostesses, and determined which room each hostess would serve each night.

In their plea agreement, the defendants admitted that, since December 2007, dozens of female employees who investigators encountered at High Society/Tomato were illegal aliens from South Korea. The conspirators admitted that they used apartments in Annandale, Va., to harbor the illegal aliens who worked at High Society/Tomato and that they or co-conspirators sometimes booked flights for the aliens.

According to court documents, the hostesses who worked at High Society/Tomato generally would work there for less than three months. After that, some of the women would move to other locations to work at other room salons. While working at High Society/Tomato, Surh and the madames would instruct the hostesses to wear dresses or skirts and to make themselves appear desirable to the male clientele. The servers were paid approximately \$50 per night in salary, and kept 100 percent of the cash tips they accumulated and 80 percent of the tips they received when such tips were charged on credit cards. The defendants also admitted that the room salon grossed more than \$4 million since December 2007.

The case was investigated by ICE HSI Washington, with the assistance of the Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, the Fairfax County Police Department, and the Falls Church Police Department. Special Assistant United States Attorneys Michael J. Frank and James S. Yoon are prosecuting the case on behalf