

PRESS RELEASE

Three Indicted for Forced Labor and One Charged with Labor Trafficking at Woburn Restaurants

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts

BOSTON – A father and son who own two Woburn restaurants, Taste of Brazil—Tudo Na Brasa and The Dog House Bar and Grill, along with their relative who lives in Brazil, have been charged with conspiring to obtain labor and services from migrants whom they smuggled into the United States from Brazil through threats of serious harm.

Jesse James Moraes, 65, and Hugo Giovanni Moraes, 43, both of Woburn; and Chelbe Willams Moraes, 62—the brother of Jesse Moraes and uncle of Hugo Moraes—of Minas Gerais, Brazil were charged in a superseding indictment with forced labor conspiracy; Jesse Moraes and Hugo Moraes were charged with forced labor and attempted forced labor; and Jesse Moraes was charged with labor trafficking and attempted labor trafficking and money laundering conspiracy.

Jesse Moraes, Hugo Moraes and Chelbe Moraes were previously charged with encouraging and inducing, and conspiring to encourage and induce, an alien to come to, enter and reside in the United States for the purpose of commercial advantage or private financial gain, knowing and in reckless disregard of the fact that such coming to, entry, and residence is or will be in violation of law. Chelbe Moraes also faces additional charges of money laundering conspiracy and money laundering with intent to promote the smuggling operation and conceal the source of smuggling proceeds.

“This case is another stark example of the human trafficking that’s happening every single day in our country and our Commonwealth and the heinous lengths some employers go to in the pursuit of profit,” said United States Attorney Rachael S. Rollins. “It is alleged that these defendants conspired to take advantage of the American dream. Individuals seeking to come to the United States for a better life to benefit themselves and their families were allegedly taken advantage of and deceived. We allege that these

defendants endangered the victims they smuggled and compelled them to work through threats of violence and other serious harm. Additionally, Chelbe Moraes allegedly provided false documents to help migrants enter the United States and claim asylum. This hurts the overwhelming majority of people who abide by our immigration laws, especially those seeking refuge out of fear of persecution in their home country. The victims in this case are real people with families who have taken on immeasurable risk to come to the United States, only to be met with threats of violence and oppression. Such conduct will not be tolerated in our Commonwealth.”

“Labor traffickers treat humans like commodities, profiting from the mistreatment of their workforce and using force, fraud, or coercion to push people to work and make it difficult or impossible to leave. Today’s superseding indictment alleges that Moraes and his conspirators smuggled individuals into the United States, charging them tens of thousands of dollars only to withhold wages to ostensibly pay back their smuggling debt,” said Michael J. Krol, Acting Special Agent in Charge for Homeland Security Investigations in New England. “Homeland Security Investigations is proud to work every day with our partners to investigate and seek justice for survivors of human trafficking.”

“An important part of the mission of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General is to investigate allegations of labor trafficking involving the use of coercion or force. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to investigate these types of allegations,” said Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge of the Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

According to the charging documents, Chelbe Moraes and his co-conspirators targeted and smuggled migrants from Brazil into the United States for a fee of approximately \$18,000 – 22,000. Once the migrants were in the United States, Jesse Moraes and Hugo Moraes allegedly targeted and recruited migrants to work in their restaurants in Woburn by promising them good jobs and a better life than they had in Brazil and arranging for the victims to rent or share the rental of one or more apartments owned or controlled by the defendants. It is alleged that Jesse Moraes and Hugo Moraes withheld wages from the victims in order to pay off their smuggling debts and forced the victims to work long hours, often performing difficult manual labor, while subjecting the victims to threats of serious harm – including financial harm, violence and deportation to prevent them from quitting and demanding better pay and working conditions. It is further alleged that Chelbe Moraes, Jesse Moraes and Hugo Moraes gave or offered to give fake documentation to the victims in order to support asylum claims or false claims of work authorization.

Members of the public who believe they may be victims of the alleged crimes, or have information or questions about this case, are encouraged to call 888-221-6023, Option 5 or send an email with contact information to USAMA.VictimAssistance@usdoj.gov.

The charges of forced labor, attempted forced labor, and forced labor conspiracy provide for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, up to five years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charge of labor trafficking and attempted labor trafficking provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, up to five years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charge of encouraging and inducing, and conspiring to encourage and induce, an alien to come to, enter, and reside in the United States for financial gain, knowing and in reckless disregard of the fact that such coming to, entry, and residence is or will be in violation of law provides for a sentence of up to 10 years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charges of money laundering and money laundering conspiracy provide for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a fine of \$500,000 or twice the amount involved in the transaction, whichever is greater. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and statutes which govern the determination of a sentence in a criminal case.

U.S. Attorney Rollins; HSI Acting SAC Krol; DOL-OIG SAC Mellone; Joleen D. Simpson, Special Agent in Charge of the Internal Revenue Service's Criminal Investigations in Boston; and Woburn Police Chief Robert F. Rufo, Jr., made the announcement today. Valuable assistance in the investigation was provided by the Norwood Police Department. Assistant U.S. Attorneys James D. Herbert, Kelly Lawrence and Samuel R. Feldman of Rollins' Criminal Division are prosecuting the case.

The details contained in the charging documents are allegations. The defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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