

PRESS RELEASE

Conspirators sentenced for engaging in a multitude of fraud schemes, including romance scams, investment fraud, and business email compromise, to steal at least \$17 million

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Texas

SHERMAN, Texas –Multiple defendants have been sentenced to federal prison for their role in an elaborate fraud scheme in the Eastern District of Texas, announced Acting U.S. Attorney Jay R. Combs.

Damilola Kumapayi, 39, of Plano, pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit wire fraud and was sentenced to 109 months in federal prison.

Sandra Iribhogbe Popnen, 50, of Plano, pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit wire fraud and conspiring to commit money laundering and was sentenced to 365 months in federal prison.

Edgal Iribhogbe, 51, of Allen, was found guilty at trial of conspiring to commit wire fraud and conspiring to commit money laundering and was sentenced to 480 months in federal prison.

Chidindu Okeke, 32, of Houston, was found guilty at trial of conspiring to commit wire fraud and conspiring to commit money laundering and was sentenced to 480 months in federal prison.

Chiagoziem Okeke, 32, of Houston, was found guilty at trial of conspiring to commit wire fraud and conspiring to commit money laundering and was sentenced to 480 months in federal prison.

"Transnational organized criminals targeting the hard-earned savings of elderly and vulnerable populations are simply despicable," said Acting U.S. Attorney Jay R. Combs. "The long arm of the American justice system has no limits when it comes to reaching fraudsters who prey on our nation's most vulnerable populations. The defendants' lengthy sentences in this case reflect the seriousness of their crimes and the dedication of law enforcement officers and prosecutors to bring them to justice. I want to thank our law enforcement partners for their outstanding work on this case."

"The defendants were part of a transnational organized crime syndicate that defrauded victims collectively out of millions of dollars. For some individuals, this was their life savings, and they were unable to financially recover," said FBI Dallas Special Agent in Charge R. Joseph Rothrock. "We hope these sentences give them a sense of comfort and sends a clear message that the FBI is committed to pursuing justice for victims."

"The collective sentences of nearly 160 years handed down to these defendants is a testament to the unwavering resolve of IRS Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) and our law enforcement partners," said Christopher J. Altemus, Jr., IRS-CI Special Agent in Charge of the Dallas Field Office. "Through relentless investigation and prosecution, they have brought justice to the victims, holding these predators accountable for exploiting trust and devastating lives. IRS-CI and our partners are committed to prosecuting criminals for financial crimes, especially those that prey on our elderly and vulnerable."

The sentencing hearings were held before U.S. District Judge Amos L. Mazzant, III on June 16, 2025, in Sherman.

According to information presented in court, beginning around January 2017, the defendants used a multitude of fraudulent schemes to obtain money from their victims, including online romance scams, business email compromise and investor fraud, and unemployment insurance fraud. The defendants coordinated how to extract money from their victims, and then how to disguise, disburse, and launder that money once they successfully defrauded their victims. The scheme resulted in approximately \$17 million fraudulently obtained from at least 100 individual victims, companies, and government entities from across the world. The scheme specifically targeted elderly persons and used various schemes such as online dating sites to lure their victims. Once funds were obtained from their victims, the defendants laundered the money through a network of various bank accounts and sent money to bank accounts, co-conspirators and businesses located in Africa and Asia.

This case is part of Operation Take Back America, a nationwide initiative that marshals the full resources of the Department of Justice to repel the invasion of illegal immigration, achieve the total elimination of cartels and transnational criminal

organizations (TCOs), and protect our communities from the perpetrators of violent crime. Operation Take Back America streamlines efforts and resources from the Department's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETFs) and Project Safe Neighborhood (PSN).

This case was investigated by the FBI's Dallas Field Office; Homeland Security Investigations; Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation; Department of Labor-Office of Inspector General; the U.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service (DSS); U.S. Postal Inspection Service; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service; Allen Police Department; Denton Police Department; Dallas County Sheriff's Office; and Texas Department of Public Safety. This case was prosecuted by assistant U.S. attorneys in the Plano office.

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