

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Illegal Alien Sentenced in Multi-State Racketeering Conspiracy Involving the Forced Labor of Mexican Workers**

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## **For Immediate Release**

Office of Public Affairs

### **Four Co-Defendants Were Previously Sentenced for Their Roles in Compelling the Labor of H-2A Visa Recipients Throughout the Southeastern United States**

An illegal alien was sentenced today to 70 months in prison and three years of supervised release for his role in a federal racketeering conspiracy that relied on fraudulent submissions to immigration authorities and used fraud and coercion to victimize Mexican H-2A workers who, between 2015 and 2017, had worked in the United States harvesting fruits, vegetables, and other agricultural products. The defendant was also ordered to pay restitution to the victims.

“The defendant fraudulently used the H-2A visa program to recruit and exploit vulnerable victims for his financial gain,” said Assistant Attorney General A. Tysen Duva of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division. “This case reflects the Department’s commitment to protect the integrity of our nation’s immigration system and hold those accountable who, after engaging in visa fraud, then use deception and coercion to abuse and exploit foreign workers. We will continue to investigate and prosecute those who benefit from human trafficking here and abroad and will continue to place a high priority on those who use fraudulent submissions to immigration authorities to enable them to secure their victims’ presence in the United States.”

“The victims in this case were deceived by conspirators and subjected to deplorable conditions while being exploited for greed and profit,” said U.S. Attorney Gregory W. Kehoe for the Middle District of Florida. “Today’s judgment sends a clear message that we will leverage the resources of our law enforcement partners to uphold our nation’s immigration laws and vigorously prosecute those who engage in human trafficking.”

"Villatoro Moreno and his co-conspirators lured victims from Mexico with false promises of fair wages and good working conditions. It was all a lie," said Special Agent in Charge Brett Skiles of the FBI Miami Field Office. "In addition to harsh and extreme working conditions, the workers were subjected to poor living conditions, charged excessive expenses, and endured humiliating treatment and threats. Not only is this wrong, but it is also against the law. Investigating this case was a team effort. I commend the Palm Beach County Human Trafficking Task Force, the Department of Labor, the Diplomatic Security Service, and numerous workers' rights groups for their close cooperation. I especially thank the Government of Mexico for their significant assistance in the extradition of Villatoro Moreno to the United States. If you are a human trafficking victim or have information about a suspected trafficking crime, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) at 1-888-373-7888 or text 233733."

"Today's sentence sends a clear message that those who exploit vulnerable workers and engage in forced labor will face serious consequences," said Acting Special Agent in Charge Jose R. Figueroa of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Miami Field Office. "We are committed to protecting workers, safeguarding the integrity of the H-2A program, and relentlessly pursuing those who manipulate the immigration system. HSI will continue to leverage partnerships across the government, with private industry, and around the world to combat forced labor and disrupt crimes of victimization."

According to court documents, Alexander Villatoro Moreno, 53, also known as "Quichi," of Chiapas, Mexico, along with his co-defendants, operated and managed Los Villatoros Harvesting (LVH), a farm labor contracting company. Between approximately 2015 and 2017, LVH functioned as a criminal enterprise compelling victims to work in Florida, Kentucky, Indiana, Georgia and North Carolina. Villatoro Moreno and his co-defendants fraudulently recruited Mexican nationals to come into the United States on short-term, H-2A agricultural visas and misled the United States to secure valid H-2A visas for the victims. Villatoro Moreno and his co-defendants charged workers exorbitant recruitment fees to work for LVH and lied to the victims about how much they would be paid, the hours they would work, the working conditions, and the reimbursement they would receive for paying recruitment fees and other expenses. Once in the United States, Villatoro Moreno and his co-defendants then compelled the workers to provide long hours of physically demanding agricultural labor, six to seven days a week, for far less pay than they were entitled to under the law.

In addition to the work conditions, Villatoro Moreno and his co-defendants used various coercive means to compel the victims' labor, including imposing debts on workers; confiscating the workers' passports; subjecting workers to crowded, unsanitary and degrading living conditions; verbally abusing and humiliating the workers; threatening

workers with arrest, jailtime, and deportation; isolating workers by preventing them from interacting with anyone other than LVH employees; and threatening to physically harm the workers' family members back in Mexico if the workers failed to comply with their demands.

When officials began investigating, Villatoro Moreno obstructed the federal investigation by helping to prepare false payroll information to conceal underpayments to the workers and distributing fake reimbursement receipts to the victims to make it appear that LVH was complying with the law by reimbursing the workers for their travel-related expenses.

Villatoro Moreno [pleaded guilty](#) to conspiracy under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act.

Villatoro Moreno's four co-defendants previously pleaded guilty in connection with their roles in the scheme. Bladimir Moreno, Villatoro Moreno's brother and a Mexican national, owned LVH and pleaded guilty in 2022 to conspiracy to violate the RICO Act and conspiracy to commit forced labor. Efrain Cabrera Rodas, an illegal alien from Mexico, and Christina Gamez, LVH supervisors, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to violate the RICO Act while Guadalupe Mendes Mendoza, another LVH supervisor, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to obstruct a federal investigation. In 2022, Bladimir Moreno was sentenced to 118 months in prison and ordered to pay over \$175,000 in restitution to the victims while Rodas and Gamez were sentenced to 41 months and 37 months in prison, respectively. Mendoza was also sentenced in 2022 to serve eight months of home detention and a \$5,500 fine to be paid over 24 months of supervised release.

The Palm Beach County Human Trafficking Task Force, which includes the FBI, HSI, and the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office investigated the case. The Task Force received assistance from the Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General, the Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division, the U.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Colorado Legal Services Migrant Farm Worker Division, Legal Aid Services of Oregon Farmworker Program and Indiana Legal Services Worker Rights and Protection Project.

The Government of Mexico, including the Fiscalía General de la República (FGR), provided significant assistance in the extradition of Villatoro Moreno to the United States. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs provided significant assistance in securing the arrest and extradition of Villatoro Moreno from Mexico.

Trial Attorney Matthew Thiman of the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Ilyssa Spergel for the Middle District of

Florida prosecuted the case. Former Trial Attorney and current Assistant U.S. Attorney Maryam Zhuravitsky for the District of Maryland also prosecuted the case.

Anyone who has information about human trafficking should report that information to the National Human Trafficking Hotline toll-free at 1-888-373-7888, which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For more information about human trafficking, please visit [www.humantraffickinghotline.org](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org). Information on the Justice Department's efforts to combat human trafficking can be found at [www.justice.gov/humantrafficking](http://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking).

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