

PRESS RELEASE

Nigerian National Pleads Guilty to Romance and Pandemic Relief Fraud Scheme

Tuesday, July 30, 2024

For Immediate Release

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

BOSTON – A Nigerian national pleaded guilty on July 26, 2024 in federal court in Boston to his role in an expansive online fraud scheme targeting individuals in the United States, including pandemic relief fraud, romance scams and other online scams.

Amowie Kelvin Imatitikua, 37, who previously lived in the Boston area, pleaded guilty to one count of bank fraud, one count of bank fraud conspiracy and one count of money laundering conspiracy. U.S. District Court Judge Patti B. Saris scheduled sentencing for Nov. 6, 2024. Imatitikua was indicted on Dec. 12, 2023.

Imatitikua opened multiple bank accounts in the names of fake people using fraudulent foreign passports and used those accounts to receive the proceeds from various frauds perpetrated by his alleged co-conspirators, including pandemic relief fraud, romance scams and other online scams. In total, between approximately 2019 and 2021, Imatitikua received more than \$400,000 in fraud proceeds.

The charges of bank fraud and conspiracy to commit bank provide for a sentence of up to 30 years in prison, five years of supervised release, a fine of up to \$1 million or twice the gross gain or loss, whichever is greater, and forfeiture. The charge of money laundering conspiracy provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release, a fine of \$500,000, or twice the value of the criminally derived property, whichever is greater, and forfeiture. 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.

Acting United States Attorney Joshua S. Levy; Jodi Cohen, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Division; Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in

Charge of Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; Michael J. Krol, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New England; and Supervisory Special Agent Matthew O'Brien, Special Agent in Charge of U.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service, Boston Field Office made the announcement. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Christopher J. Markham and Benjamin A. Saltzman of the Securities, Financial & Cyber Fraud Unit are prosecuting the case.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

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

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Topic

DISASTER FRAUD

Component

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