

PRESS RELEASE

# Woman and Her Two Daughters Convicted in Child Labor Trafficking Conspiracy in Chicago Suburbs

Tuesday, January 23, 2024

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Illinois

CHICAGO — A federal jury today convicted a woman and her two daughters on child labor trafficking charges for forcing two undocumented West African children to work in the Chicago suburbs.

NAWOMI AWOGA, 75, of Hazel Crest, Ill., and her two daughters, MARINA OKE, also known as Marina Fandohan, 38, of Country Club Hills, Ill., and ASSIBA LEA FANDOHAN, 35, of Hazel Crest, Ill., were each found guilty of one count of conspiracy to conceal, harbor, and shield from detection two children from the West African country of Benin, one count of concealment of an undocumented immigrant, and one count of forcing labor through threats of serious harm to a victim or another person.

The jury returned its verdicts this afternoon after a two-week trial in U.S. District Court in Chicago. U.S. District Judge John Robert Blakey did not immediately set sentencing dates.

According to evidence presented at trial, Awoga coached the victims, then age 14 and 12, in Benin to lie to U.S. immigration authorities about their family relationships in order to obtain tourist visas, and then accompanied them into the United States. Once in the U.S., the defendants harbored the victims in residences in the Chicago suburbs of Country Club Hills and Hazel Crest while the victims were forced to provide labor and services for the defendants' financial gain. The defendants used violence against the victims to force them to work both inside the residences and at a hair salon.

The convictions were announced by Morris Pasqual, Acting United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; Sean Fitzgerald, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago office

of Homeland Security Investigations; Irene Lindow, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General in Chicago; and Mark Woods-Hawkins, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service (DSS). Substantial assistance in the investigation was provided by the Cook County Sheriff's Office, Chicago Police Department, Department of Homeland Security's Center for Countering Human Trafficking, and the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Cotonou, Benin. The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Barry Jonas and Tiffany Ardam, and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Kristin M. Linsley.

Anyone with information about a potential human trafficking situation or a person who may be experiencing human trafficking should contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline by calling 1-888-373-7888 or texting 233733. More information about the Justice Department's work to combat human trafficking can be found [here](#).

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