

PRESS RELEASE

Woman and Her Two Daughters Sentenced to Federal Prison for Labor Trafficking Conspiracy in Chicago Suburbs

Friday, September 27, 2024

For Immediate Release

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

CHICAGO — A woman and her two daughters were sentenced to federal prison terms today for conspiring to force undocumented West African children to work in the Chicago suburbs.

NAWOMI AWOGA and her two daughters, MARINA OKE and ASSIBA LEA FANDOHAN, were convicted last year of conspiring to conceal, harbor, and shield from detection two children from the West African country of Benin. 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. Awoga then accompanied the children into the United States. Once in the U.S., Awoga, Oke, and Fandohan harbored the victims in residences in the Chicago suburbs of Country Club Hills and Hazel Crest while forcing the victims 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 nearby hair salon.

U.S. District Judge John Robert Blakey imposed the prison sentences today in federal court in Chicago. Awoga, 75, of Hazel Crest, Ill., was sentenced to eight and a half years. Oke, 38, of Country Club Hills, Ill., was sentenced to seven years and ten months. Fandohan, 35, of Hazel Crest, Ill., was sentenced to six years and eight months.

The sentences 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; James Mead, Special Agent-in-Charge, Great Lakes Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General; and Mark Woods-Hawkins, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Department of State Diplomatic Security Service's Chicago Field Office. Substantial assistance in the investigation was provided by the Cook County Sheriff's Office, Chicago Police Department, U.S. Department of Homeland

Security's Center for Countering Human Trafficking, and the U.S. Embassy's Regional Security Office in Cotonou, Benin. The government was represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Barry Jonas and Tiffany Ardam, and former Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Kristin M. Linsley.

"Labor traffickers exploit and endanger some of the most vulnerable members of our society and cause unimaginable harm," said Acting U.S. Attorney Pasqual. "My office is committed to using every available resource to combat labor trafficking and support victims and survivors."

"The conviction of Awoga and her daughters underscores our unwavering commitment to bringing justice to the most vulnerable among us," said HSI SAC Fitzgerald. "These defendants not only exploited and abused two young children, but they also coerced them into lying to authorities to facilitate their heinous scheme. This case highlights the relentless efforts of our law enforcement partners to dismantle such criminal networks and ensure that those who perpetrate these despicable acts are held accountable."

"Nawomi Awoga, Marina Oke, and Assiba Lea Fandohan trafficked two children who they forced to work for them," said DOL-OIG SAC Mead. "The Office of Inspector General is committed to working with our law enforcement partners to aggressively investigate and bring to justice those who engage in labor trafficking and involuntary servitude, particularly when minors are involved."

"Combating trafficking requires a strong coalition of local and global partners to share resources and information, better equip front-line workers, and track and respond to evolving trafficking trends," said DSS SAC Woods-Hawkins. "I'm proud to say that justice was finally served in this child labor trafficking case that has spanned nearly a decade. It was through our successful partnership with the U.S. Embassy in Benin, Homeland Security Investigations, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Justice that we were able to secure this verdict and move closer to delivering justice for the victims."

Anyone with information about a potential human trafficking situation is encouraged to 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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