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News Releases

October 14, 2010 A rectangular button with the word "SHARE" in all caps, followed by small icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Email.

Brazilian couple sentenced in \$55 million visa fraud scheme

ORLANDO, Fla. - A Brazilian husband and wife were sentenced Thursday for their involvement in a \$55 million visa fraud scheme, following an investigation led by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

Wilson, 63, and Valeria Barbugli, 57, were sentenced to 18 and 24 months in federal prison, respectively, by U.S. District Judge Mary S. Scriven, Middle District of Florida.

The couple was convicted of conspiracy, visa fraud and alien smuggling as part of an elaborate scheme which allowed illegal aliens to work at jobs that normally would have been filled by U.S. citizens.

"These individuals orchestrated a large-scale visa fraud ring and knowingly employed foreign nationals not authorized to work in the United States, compromising our nation's immigration system and putting our communities at risk," said ICE Director John Morton.

"Visa fraud presents a vulnerability that could be exploited by dangerous criminals or even terrorists. That is why ICE will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to ensure that those who attempt to exploit these systems pay the price for their crimes."

As part of their sentence, the court also imposed a money judgment in the amount of \$55 million, which represents the illegal proceeds generated during the course of the conspiracy.

Their son, Eduardo Barbugli, is scheduled to be sentenced on Dec. 3 for his part in the conspiracy.

The Barbuglis are citizens of Brazil and will be subject to removal from the United States after they serve their respective sentences.

According to court documents, the Barbuglis used a temporary labor staffing conglomerate that supplied workers to more than 160 hotels.

Through their complex visa fraud and alien smuggling activities the defendants allowed more than 1,000 illegal aliens to fraudulently enter and remain in the United States using fraudulently obtained H-2B employment-based visas. An H-2B visa is granted to certain qualified foreign workers seeking temporary employment in the United States.

As part of the conspiracy, the Barbuglis submitted false documentation to the government and manipulated the H-2B visa process. The Barbuglis submitted altered hotel contract agreements to conceal their activities and falsely reported that U.S. workers had been hired when they had not.

The Barbuglis also falsely claimed that no payments were being collected from the alien workers, when in fact the workers had actually paid between \$350-\$750 each to be placed on the fraudulent H-2B visa petitions.

The couple used shell companies in successive petitions to create the illusion that new bona fide companies had temporary labor needs. This was done to deceive authorities and hide the fact that all of the workers were employed by the same corporation, VR Services, without interruption. This elaborate deceit enabled VR Services to establish a permanent foreign labor pool, which employed illegal alien workers across the United States in jobs that would have normally been filled by U.S. citizens.

U.S. Attorney Robert E. O'Neill stated, "Visa fraud is a threat to Homeland Security. Employers that subvert our immigration laws for greed and financial gain will be investigated and prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Their activities will not be tolerated."

Richard Walker, special agent in charge for the Atlanta Region of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations said, "Today's sentencing underscores our efforts to investigate fraud against the Department of Labor's foreign labor certification programs. These defendants falsified labor certification applications that allowed more than 1,000 foreign workers to come to or remain in the United States. The Office of Inspector General and its law enforcement partners remain committed to combating this type of fraud."

Jeffrey W. Culver, Director with the U.S. State Department's Diplomatic Security Service, in Washington said, "The Diplomatic Security Service is firmly committed to working with the U.S. Attorney's Office and Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force to investigate and bring those who commit visa fraud to justice."

"Today, justice was done in sentencing criminals who exploited immigration laws for personal gain. USCIS is proud to have assisted in the investigation and will continue working to ensure the integrity of the legal immigration process," stated Kathy Redman, acting southeast regional director for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

This case was jointly investigated by the Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force, a multi-agency task force that coordinates investigations into fraudulent immigration documents. The task force

included ICE, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of State and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephanie E. Gorman prosecuted the case.

For the most up-to-date ICE information, [sign up \(http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://service.govdelivery.com/service/multi_subscribe.html?code=USDHSICE\)](http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://service.govdelivery.com/service/multi_subscribe.html?code=USDHSICE) for ICE e-mail alerts. You may also visit us on [Twitter \(http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://www.twitter.com/wwwicegov\)](http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://www.twitter.com/wwwicegov) and [YouTube \(http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://www.youtube.com/wwwicegov\)](http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://www.youtube.com/wwwicegov).

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