



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

U.S. INDICTS SEVEN FOR PASSPORT FRAUD AND ALIEN SMUGGLING CONSPIRACIES

CHICAGO, IL – Seven Chicago area defendants were indicted on federal charges for allegedly conspiring in various combinations with one another to fraudulently obtain U.S. passports in the names of U.S. citizens, using photographs of individuals – mostly children – from South America to assist them in illegally entering the United States.

The defendants were charged in three separate indictments that were returned by a federal grand jury late yesterday and announced today by Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois. One indictment alleges that the defendants fraudulently obtained between 300 and 500 U.S. passports by recruiting and paying approximately \$300 to various U.S. citizens who then applied for a passport in their own name or the name of their child using photographs of aliens supplied by some of the defendants. Some defendants either paid or received from approximately \$1,000 to \$1,400 for each fraudulent passport.

Mr. Fitzgerald announced the charges with Elissa A. Brown, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago office of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; Anita L. Davidson, Inspector-in-Charge of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service in Chicago; and James D. Lemarie, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. State Department's Diplomatic Security Service, whose agencies conducted a joint investigation.

All three indictments charge each defendant with conspiracy to commit passport fraud by making false statements in applications for U.S. passports and to commit alien smuggling by assisting the illegal entry of foreign nationals in the country.

“Human smuggling is a dangerous and profitable criminal enterprise that threatens our national security,” said Ms. Brown. “The arrests that led to these indictments demonstrate ICE's commitment to dismantling these organizations and increasing the security of our nation.”

Each defendant will be arraigned at a later date in U.S. District Court. The three indictments charge the following defendants:

United States v. Hernandez, et al., 04 CR 650

Carmen M. Hernandez, 43, of Chicago, was charged with conspiracy and five counts of passport fraud; Angel E. Ayala, 47, of Chicago, was charged with conspiracy and one count of passport fraud. Both defendants are U.S. citizens. Between 2000 and January 2004, Hernandez allegedly obtained and sold to three unnamed individuals, as well as to Efrain and Joanne Rendon, both of whom were indicted separately, between 300 and 500 U.S. passports that were fraudulently obtained by U.S. citizens using photographs of individuals from South America. According to the indictment, Hernandez received between \$1,000 and \$1,400 from five co-conspirators including the Rendons for each passport she obtained using photographs they provided. Hernandez then paid approximately \$300 to various citizens she recruited who fraudulently obtained passports in their own name or their child's name. Ayala allegedly agreed to assist Hernandez beginning no later than July 2003. In July 2003, Hernandez allegedly met with an individual who in fact was an undercover agent posing as a citizen who would submit passport applications in the names of purported children using photographs of South American children provided by Hernandez.

Hernandez was initially arrested on a complaint in July and remains free on her own recognizance. Ayala was charged for the first time in the indictment.

United States v. Rendon, et al., 04 CR 651

Efrain Rendon, 49, of Chicago, his wife, Joanne Rendon, 37, of Chicago, and Miguel Colon, 39, of Mount Prospect, were each charged with one count of conspiracy to commit passport fraud and alien smuggling. Joanne Rendon and Colon are U.S. citizens; Efrain Rendon is a citizen of Ecuador. Between March 2003 and July 2004, they allegedly conspired with Carmen Hernandez and others to recruit U.S. citizens to submit fraudulent U.S. passport applications in the names of the U.S. citizens or their children using photographs of individuals from South America to assist the illegal entry of those individuals to the United States. According to the indictment, the Rendons told Colon and Hernandez the age and gender of children and adults from South America for whom they were seeking U.S. passports so Colon and Hernandez could recruit citizens of similar ages and gender or who had children who matched the requests. The Rendons then supplied Colon and Hernandez with photographs of South American nationals to submit with the passport applications. The Rendons allegedly paid Colon and Hernandez between \$1,200 and \$1,400 for each fraudulently obtained U.S. passport. The Rendons supplied Colon with approximately 40 photographs in 2003 and Colon provided approximately 30 bogus passports during the time, the indictment alleges.

The Rendons also were arrested in July on a complaint. Joanne was released on her own recognizance, while Efrain Rendon remains detained in federal custody. Colon was charged for the first time in the indictment.

United States v. Rendon-Arizaga, et al., 04 CR 656

Henry Bolivar Rendon-Arizaga, 28, of Chicago, the nephew of Efrain and Joanne Rendon; Miguel Colon, 39, of Mount Prospect, and his wife, Jennifer Colon, 29, of Mount Prospect, were each

charged with one count of conspiracy to commit passport fraud and alien smuggling, while Rendon-Arizaga was also charged with one count of passport fraud. The Colons are U.S. citizens; Rendon-Arizaga is a citizen of Ecuador. Between October 2003 and July 2004, Rendon-Arizaga allegedly agreed with unnamed Co-conspirator A, an individual in Ecuador, to fraudulently obtain U.S. passports to assist the illegal entry of individuals from South America. He told the Colons the age and gender of individuals seeking passports so they could recruit appropriate individuals to assist them and he provided them with at least eight photographs to submit with false passport applications, according to the indictment. Rendon-Arizaga then allegedly paid Miguel Colon about \$1,200 for each passport. On July 16, Rendon-Arizaga allegedly caused \$7,200 to be transferred from Co-conspirator A in Ecuador to Chicago to use the funds to pay for four fraudulent passports. On July 21, Rendon-Arizaga allegedly gave \$4,800 to an individual cooperating with law enforcement agents for four false U.S. passports bearing photographs that he had provided.

Rendon-Arizaga was also arrested in July on a complaint, and he remains detained in federal custody. The Colons were charged for the first time in the indictment.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Rick Young.

If convicted, the conspiracy count against each defendant carries a maximum penalty of 5 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. Those defendants charged with additional counts of passport fraud face a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine on each of those counts. The Court, however, would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed.

The public is reminded that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial at which the United States has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), responsible for the enforcement of border, economic, infrastructure, and transportation security laws. ICE seeks to prevent acts of terrorism by targeting the people, money and materials that support terror and criminal networks.