Friday, Nov. 8, 2019
9:00 AM – 10:15 AM

Session 105 | Human Trafficking: It’s Not About the Wall and Never Has Been

On August 2, 1995, a pre-dawn hour raid on an El Monte, California compound freed 72 enslaved Thai garment workers — heralded as the first case of modern day slavery. Today, persons of Asian and Pacific Islander descent continue to be the majority of victims of human trafficking. This panel will explore how human trafficking occurred in 1995 and, using original schematics, how transnational human trafficking is currently committed in the United States. The architect of the first major U.S. city’s comprehensive anti-trafficking program, members of the first API human trafficking task force, and representatives from the El Monte case, the Global Horizons case (then-largest case of forced labor), and the Bangkok Dark Nights case prosecuted in Minnesota (the largest case of transnational sexual slavery), will use the recent large-scale sexual slavery case to expose how traffickers perpetrated an intricate scheme of visa fraud, debt bondage, and money laundering to lure thousands of Thai women to the U.S. This panel will present how victims of human trafficking must navigate immigration, criminal, civil rights, and labor laws; and will also share successful strategies for combatting trafficking at the local levels of government and business and via the task force model.

Moderator:
Paul O. Hirose, Perkins Coie LLP

Speakers:
Paul Chang, U.S. Department of Labor
Chanchanit (Chancee) Martorell, Thai Community Development Center
Marty B. Lorenzo, Petco
Panida M. Rzonca, Thai Community Development Center
Session 105
Human Trafficking: It’s Not About the Wall and Never Has Been

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Human Trafficking Facts

- 24.9 million people are victims of forced labor.
- 16 million people are exploited in the private sector, 4.8 million persons in forced sexual exploitation, and over 4 million in forced labor imposed by state authorities.
- Forced labor in the private economy generates US$150 billion in illegal profits per year.

WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

Use of **force, fraud (deception)** or **coercion** to obtain, **transport** or **harbor** another person for commercial gain. There are two main forms.

**Labor Trafficking**

The **recruitment, harboring, transportation, or obtaining** a person for labor or services, through the use of **force, fraud, or coercion**, for the purpose of subjection to **involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery**.

**Sex Trafficking**

**Sex trafficking** in which a commercial sex act is induced by **force, fraud, or coercion**, or in which the person induced to perform such act has **not attained 18 years of age**.
Traffickers undertake ACTION using MEANS for the PURPOSE of exploiting people.
THE PROFITS MADE FROM HUMAN TRAFFICKING

- Commercial Sexual Exploitation: 66% ($99 Billion)
- Forced labor: 28.7% ($43.2 Billion)
- Domestic Servitude: 5.3% ($8 Billion)

Info from: International Labour Organization 2014
Companies subject to the Transparency in Supply Chains Act must disclose the extent of their efforts in five areas: verification, audits, certification, internal accountability, and training. Specifically, in its supply chains disclosure, a company must disclose to what extent, if any, it:

- Engages in verification of product supply chains to evaluate and address risks of human trafficking and slavery. The disclosure shall specify if the verification was not conducted by a third party.

- Conducts audits of suppliers to evaluate supplier compliance with company standards for trafficking and slavery in supply chains. The disclosure shall specify if the verification was not an independent, unannounced audit.

- Requires direct suppliers to certify that materials incorporated into the product comply with the laws regarding slavery and human trafficking of the country or countries in which they are doing business.

- Maintains internal accountability standards and procedures for employees or contractors failing to meet company standards regarding slavery and trafficking.

- Provides company employees and management, who have direct responsibility for supply chain management, training on human trafficking and slavery, particularly with respect to mitigating risks within the supply chains of products.
VICTORY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS: Since 1995, Thai CDC has played a pivotal role in over half a dozen major human rights cases

- **1995 El Monte Case** – The first foreign national modern day slavery case in U.S. history, Thai CDC worked to liberate, resettle, and empower 72 Thai garment workers from the infamous El Monte Slave Shop

- **1996 Thai Garment Workers' Case** - Came to the aid of another case of Thai garment workers

- **1997 Thai Sexual Slavery Case** - Came to the aid of Thai women trafficked for sexual slavery

- **1998-2000 Thai Domestic Workers' Case** - Redress and restitution for Thai domestic worker escapees
Thai CDC Cases Continued

- **2003 T-Visas were granted to trafficked Thai domestic and sex workers**
- **2001-2006 Thai Welders' Case** - Helped Thai welders reach a $1.4 million settlement against Trans Bay Steel Corporation for civil rights violations. This case is the first recognized male legal contract labor case of modern day slavery.
- **2003-2012 Thai Farmworkers' Case** - Redress and restitution for hundreds of Thai farmworkers. This case is the largest human-trafficking case in U.S. history, which involves more than 900 Thai legal contract workers.
- **2009-present Thai Transnational Sex Trafficking Enterprise** – Hundreds of Thai women have been identified as victims of sexual slavery nation-wide.
## Example Table: Scales of Exploitation Intensity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODERATE (1 degree per experience)</th>
<th>MODERATE-HIGH (2 degrees per experience)</th>
<th>HIGH (3 degrees per experience)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>control over movement</td>
<td>isolation</td>
<td>physical harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overcrowded quarters</td>
<td>contract violation</td>
<td>psychological harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family lacks access to legal and/or police assistance</td>
<td>threats of violence</td>
<td>threats of prosecution, detention, deportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>withholding work</td>
<td>threats to harm family</td>
<td>dispossession of property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no privacy</td>
<td>black-listing</td>
<td>lack of food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family in home country has incurred debt</td>
<td>lack of sanitary quarters</td>
<td>debt labour contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surveillance by employer</td>
<td>abuse of authority/coercion in recruitment</td>
<td>debt amount increases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employer knowledge of family whereabouts</td>
<td>severe economic coercion</td>
<td>debt responsibility passed to family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limited knowledge of language and laws</td>
<td>Medical problem/expense</td>
<td>coercion used to recruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employer allowing visa expiration</td>
<td>fear of dispossession</td>
<td>deception used to recruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discrimination</td>
<td>family suffered lawsuit(s)</td>
<td>abuse due to vulnerability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Virtual Slavery to Being Boss

By KAREN ROBINSON-JACOBS

OCT. 25, 2001
12 AM

TIMES STAFF WRITER

Desperate to end four years of virtual slavery at a now-infamous garment factory in El Monte, Win Chuai Ngan climbed the perimeter wall, jumped down and hurried off into the darkness, uncertain where the path would lead.

Now, nearly 10 years later, he is about to mark another milestone, also begun as a leap of faith. Nov. 4 will be the one-year anniversary of the debut of Win’s Thai Cuisine, a successful Van Nuys restaurant co-owned by Chuai Ngan and his girlfriend, Sokanya Sutthiprapha.

Like Chuai Ngan, Sutthiprapha worked at the S.K. Fashion factory in El Monte, an apartment building converted to a sewing sweatshop. She was freed in a 1995 raid that generated worldwide headlines.

The operators, who imprisoned scores of Thai immigrants with threats of violence or deportation, were convicted of civil rights violations and received prison terms of up to seven years.
What money they did not use for living expenses, or send back to relatives in Thailand, they saved. They fattened their nest egg with money borrowed from Chuai Ngan's younger brother, Suwichai Chuai Ngan, also an escapee who had opened a garment factory cooperative.

With help from a Thai business assistance group, the two navigated the murky waters of municipal permitting. They scoured business-for-sale ads in Thai newspapers searching for a bargain.

When they found one, they made the leap.

“The fact that they moved from virtual imprisonment to entrepreneurship is the embodiment of the ideal of entrepreneurship,” said H. Cooke Sunoo, director of the Asian Pacific Islander Small Business Program, which honored Win’s with its small business of the year award Wednesday.

“They overcame remarkable odds, coming out of a difficult situation to accomplish something significant,” Sunoo said.

The restaurant and garment factory co-op are the only successful businesses launched by the former captives, according to officials with the Thai Community Development Center, which gave social service and business assistance to the El Monte sweatshop workers.

For Chuai Ngan and Sutthiprapha, language proved to be one of the biggest bumps along the path to proprietorship.

The two speak little English--so little that Chuai Ngan spent the first few months after opening the restaurant afraid to answer the phone, lest he confuse his English-speaking customers. (They spoke with The Times with the aid of an interpreter.)

To compensate, the couple hired a Thai waitress who speaks English. And, thanks to the efforts of the local Thai Chamber of Commerce, the two were able to take the required food-handling exam in Thai.

A second hurdle--one faced by many minority entrepreneurs--was access to capital.

Restaurant Idea Born in Trip to Thailand

Chuai Ngan, 45, said he left the sweatshop in 1992 with $300 in his pocket.

Later he, Sutthiprapha and the other workers won settlements totaling more than $4 million from three Los Angeles garment makers--with most workers getting $5,000 to $80,000. The couple declined to reveal the size of their allotment and said most of that money was sent back home long before the restaurant opened.

“After working for years we have some savings,” said Chuai Ngan, the oldest of six children in a farming family in northeastern Thailand.

The idea of opening an eatery came during a visit to Thailand.
When Sutthiprapha returned to Los Angeles, she took a job as an assistant cook at a Thai restaurant in Eagle Rock, where she trained for five months.

The two mulled the idea of starting their own place, then took the plunge.

Chuai Ngan found a Thai restaurant in Van Nuys that the owner was willing to sell for $10,000. They spent another $10,000 on equipment, food and other expenses.

Not long into the process, they contacted the Thai CDC, which had helped Sutthiprapha get her bearings after the raid.

For many of the former captives, life on the outside was daunting enough, even without the added pressures of business ownership, officials there said.

“They did not know how to navigate the city, how to take a bus, how to use a microwave. We had to show them all of that,” said Chanchanit “Chancee” Martorell, executive director of the center.

“For Win to take that next step is quite remarkable, and risky,” she said.

Rachanit “Keh” Trikandha, a business counselor for the Asian Pacific Islander small-business program who works with the Thai CDC, helped the couple negotiate a lease with the building’s landlord.

And she shepherded them through the municipal permitting process.

Neighborhood Warms to New Business

The opening-day receipts were only about $150, largely because friends and family outnumbered paying customers.

“The first day, the money we get from customers is not very much money,” Sutthiprapha said. “So we are very afraid.”

But things quickly picked up as a mix of white, Latino and Thai customers from nearby offices began to swing through to sample Sutthiprapha’s tom kah kai (hot and sour coconut chicken soup) and yum woon sen (noodles tossed with shrimp and onions).

Today, the daily receipts are several times the first-day’s modest take, they said.

It was escape, more than enterprise, that filled Chuai Ngan’s thoughts in May 1992 when he decided that life in the sweatshop had become unbearable.

“It worked nonstop, 16 to 18 hours a day, making seams,” Chuai Ngan said. “After the work, we’d just move around the house, not outside. They threaten us if we tried to go outside, if we tried to run away. I was afraid.”

During Chuai Ngan’s tenure, there were no armed guards or barbed wire blocking his escape, only a 7-foot wall--and threats from the factory operators that they would be beaten or reported to immigration authorities if they tried to flee.

Finally, at 4 a.m. one night, desperation propelled Chuai Ngan over the wall.
“I waited until everyone went to bed. Then, I sneaked out,” he said.

As entrepreneurs, the couple’s working hours are long—Win’s is open seven days a week, most days for 11 hours—but the pace is far less onerous.

There are other differences, both obvious and subtle.

Beyond pride of ownership, there are ... frequent rest breaks.

“The old work is harder, you have to concentrate a lot so you can finish everything,” Chuai Ngan said. “You have to push, push.”

“In here, we can stop and rest any time we want,” Sutthiprapha added.

And, Chuai Ngan said with a broad grin, “We can go anywhere we want.”

*

Karen Robinson-Jacobs covers minority and immigrant-owned businesses for The Times. She can be reached at karen.robinson@latimes.com.
1  Marlon Brando made Michael Jackson cry. The topic: sexuality

2  Seniors facing eviction fear homelessness and isolation as California's housing crisis rolls on

3  The debate Democrats have waited for: Joe Biden vs. Elizabeth Warren

4  Police in Alabama issue arrest warrant for Lakers' DeMarcus Cousins

5  Extreme acts of violence in Mexico are on the rise: 27 burned to death at a strip club
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
November 18, 2013

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DEL MONTE FRESH PRODUCE AGREES TO SETTLE EEOC 
FARMWORKER NATIONAL ORIGIN LAWSUIT

Federal Agency Alleged Thai Farm Workers Were Subjected to 
Discrimination on Hawaii Farm

LOS ANGELES -- Del Monte Fresh Produce, one of the country’s leading producers of fresh fruit and vegetables, has agreed to settle a discrimination lawsuit filed in Hawaii against its Hawaii subsidiary by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the federal agency announced today.

As part of the settlement, Del Monte Fresh Produce will pay $1.2 million to be distributed to the Thai claimants in the EEOC’s case. In addition, Del Monte Fresh Produce has partnered with the EEOC to champion and ensure equal employment rights and opportunities by setting an example for the U.S. farming industry.

“I am pleased the parties were able to resolve this case without resorting to prolonged and expensive litigation,” said EEOC General Counsel David Lopez. “We are hopeful that this resolution will provide a model for the agricultural industry to ensure that farm contractors comply with anti-discrimination laws.”

Specifically, Del Monte Fresh Produce has agreed to institute comprehensive protocols and accountability measures to ensure that all farm labor contractors that work with Del Monte Fresh Produce comply with federal laws against discrimination and retaliation. This is the first effort of its kind for a farm to ensure farm labor contractor accountability for federal anti-discrimination laws.

Among other things, Del Monte Fresh Produce has agreed to:
Establish procedures to ensure that farm labor contractors (FLCs) disseminate policies and procedures prohibiting discrimination to their local work force and to H2-A guest workers in a language they understand;

Establish mechanisms for FLCs to provide notices to workers about their rights under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;

Disseminate notices to all workers, including FLC and Del Monte Fresh Produce employees alike, on methods for submitting discrimination complaints;

Conduct audits to ensure FLC compliance with the consent decree throughout its term;

Designate a compliance officer for oversight of FLC compliance and Title VII compliance as required under the consent decree;

Train managers, supervisors, and employees on their obligations under Title VII; and

Report to the EEOC and keep records.

Del Monte Fresh Produce’s Hawaii subsidiary is one of the first farms to resolve its case with the EEOC. The EEOC originally filed suit in U.S. District Court for the District of Hawaii in April 2011, charging that Global Horizons, a labor contractor responsible for recruiting the Thai workers, and various farm defendants engaged in conduct that constituted national origin and race discrimination, harassment and retaliation in their treatment of farm workers recruited from Thailand from 2003 through 2006. Such alleged conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In its suit (EEOC v. Global Horizons, Inc. d/b/a Global Horizons Manpower, Inc., Case No. CV-11-00257-LEK-RLP), the EEOC named not only the recruitment company, Global Horizons, but also the following six farms in Hawaii: Del Monte Fresh Produce’s Hawaii subsidiary; Captain Cook Coffee Company, Kauai Coffee Company, Kelena Farms, MacFarms of Hawaii, and Maui Pineapple Farms.

The EEOC named Del Monte Fresh Produce’s Hawaii subsidiary, which contracted with Global for approximately three years ending in 2005 to tend pineapple fields the subsidiary leased on the island of Oahu. For its service obligations to the subsidiary, Global hired farm laborers that it trained and supervised. Those workers brought in from Thailand and placed at the various farms, the EEOC charged, were mistreated and discriminated against by Global on the subsidiary’s farm.

“We commend Del Monte Fresh Produce for taking a bold step to holding farm labor contractors accountable and to show its commitment to ensuring farm workers are treated with dignity and protected under federal anti-discrimination laws,” said Anna Y. Park, regional attorney for the EEOC’s Los Angeles District Office, which includes the state of Hawaii in its jurisdiction. “We hope this is wake-up call for others in the agricultural industry to follow Del Monte Fresh Produce’s lead in recognizing signs of potential abuses by farm labor contractors and taking proactive steps to hold them accountable.”

The EEOC is the federal agency that enforces federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination. Further information about the EEOC is available on the agency’s web site at www.eeoc.gov.

# # #
Thirty-Six Defendants Guilty for Their Roles in International Thai Sex Trafficking Organization

Five defendants were convicted yesterday by a federal jury for their roles in operating a massive international sex trafficking organization that was responsible for coercing hundreds of Thai women to engage in commercial sex acts across the United States.

Michael Morris, 65, of Seal Beach, California; Pawinee Unpradit, 46, of Dallas, Texas; Saowapha Thinram, 44, of Hutto, Texas; Thoucharin Ruttanamongkongul, 35, of Chicago Illinois; and Waralee Wanless, 39, of The Colony, Texas, were convicted following a six-week trial before Senior Judge Donovan Frank in U.S. District Court in St. Paul, Minnesota. Thirty-one defendants previously pleaded guilty for their roles in the sex trafficking organization.

The convictions were announced yesterday by U.S. Attorney Erica H. MacDonald for the District of Minnesota, Assistant Attorney General Brian A. Benczkowski of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband for the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, Special Agent in Charge Tracy J. Cormier of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) St. Paul, Supervisory Special Agent Todd Strom of IRS Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) and Directing Attorney Panida Rzonca for the Thai Community Development Center.

"More than two years ago, my office filed the first federal indictment against a criminal organization that relied on the sexual exploitation of women for their own financial gain," said U.S. Attorney MacDonald. "Since then, our team of prosecutors and investigators systematically dismantled the organization, while seeking justice for every victim of this organization. The process has been long, but today’s guilty verdict represents both a successful and just outcome. While our work combatting human trafficking continues, this case stands as a powerful example of the Department of Justice's commitment to achieving justice for victims. I applaud our law enforcement partners for the remarkable dedication and collaboration they have demonstrated throughout this process."

"The defendants convicted yesterday participated in a massive yet brutally efficient criminal enterprise that trafficked hundreds of vulnerable Thai women for sexual exploitation and used sophisticated money laundering techniques to conceal and sustain itself," said Assistant Attorney General Brian A. Benczkowski of the Justice Department's Criminal Division. "The Criminal Division, through our Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section, is committed to working with our law enforcement partners to dismantle the financial infrastructure supporting criminal organizations such as these."

"Sex trafficking is a horrific crime that seeks to erode the human dignity of victims," said Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband for the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. "I want to thank U.S. Attorney Erica H. MacDonald, the District of Minnesota's Anti-Trafficking Coordination Team, HSI St. Paul, IRS Criminal Investigations, the State Department’s Diplomatic Security Service, and other law enforcement and local partners for their hard work on this case which dismantled an extensive transnational trafficking enterprise. The Department of Justice will bring the full force of the law against perpetrators of sex trafficking crimes."

"The convictions of these defendants close this chapter for law enforcement, however mark only the beginning of the recovery process for the victims," said Special Agent in Charge Comier. "I am extremely proud of the work done by
Thirty-Six Defendants Guilty for Their Roles in International Thai Sex Trafficking Organization | OPA | Department of Justice

HSI’s special agents, and of the teamwork demonstrated by our law enforcement partners in dismantling this criminal organization. Our communities are safer as a result of this investigation.”

“The cruel and illegal actions of the defendants tear at the fabric of our community, causing trauma, fear and anguish both seen and unseen,” said St. Paul Police Chief Axtell. “Thankfully, due to the exceptional work of many law enforcement agencies and their representatives, the guilty will be held accountable for their actions and survivors will get help, support and justice.”

“The guilty verdict of these five individuals received yesterday is the culmination of a large sophisticated international sex trafficking criminal enterprise,” said IRS-CI Special Agent in Charge Strom. “This criminal organization exploited women and laundered hundreds of thousands of illicit profits. Pooling the skills of each agency in this complex investigation made a tremendous team including IRS Criminal Investigation who provided the financial expertise to follow the money trail of these criminals. Today’s guilty verdict demonstrates the collective efforts of law enforcement and U.S. Attorney’s Office who brought down an international sex trafficking organization.”

As proven at trial, this criminal organization compelled hundreds of women from Bangkok, Thailand, to engage in commercial sex acts in various cities across the United States, including Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, Phoenix, Washington, D.C., Las Vegas, Houston, Dallas, Seattle and Austin. The trafficking victims were often from impoverished backgrounds and spoke little or no English. They were coerced to participate in the criminal scheme through misleading promises of a better life in the United States and the ability to provide money to their families in Thailand.

Once in the United States, the victims were sent to houses of prostitution where they were forced to have sex with strangers – every day – for up to 12 hours a day, at times having sex with 10 men a day. The victims were isolated from the outside world. They were not allowed to leave the houses of prostitution unless accompanied by a member of the criminal organization. The victims moved around the United States between houses of prostitution in multiple cities. They and their families in Thailand were threatened.

The organization also engaged in widespread visa fraud to facilitate the international transportation of the victims. Traffickers assisted the victims in obtaining fraudulent visas and travel documents by funding false bank accounts, creating fictitious backgrounds and occupations, and instructing the victims to enter into fraudulent marriages to increase the likelihood that their visa applications would be approved. Traffickers also coached the victims as to what to say during their visa interviews. While working to obtain visa documents, traffickers gathered personal information from the victims, including the location of the victims’ families in Thailand. This information was later used to threaten victims who sought to flee the organization in the United States.

The organization dealt primarily in cash and engaged in rampant and sophisticated money laundering in order to promote and conceal illegal profits. The organization used “funnel accounts” to launder and route cash from cities across the United States to the money launderers in Los Angeles. To date, investigators have been able to recover $1.5 million in cash and $15 million in money judgments secured through plea agreements. During the extensive investigation, law enforcement traced tens of millions of dollars to the organization. Indeed, at trial, there was testimony that more than $40 million was sent to Thailand by one money launderer alone.

The District of Minnesota is one of six districts designated through a nationwide selection process as a Phase II Anti-Trafficking Coordination Team (ACTeam), an ACTeam Initiative of the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security and Labor. ACTeams focus on developing high-impact human trafficking investigations and prosecutions involving forced labor, international sex trafficking and sex trafficking by force, fraud or coercion through interagency collaboration among federal prosecutors and federal investigative agencies. Today’s convictions validate the continued ACTeam mission—to take on and take down the most entrenched and sophisticated human trafficking organizations that seek to profit from human exploitation.

U.S. Attorney MacDonald, Assistant Attorney General Benczkowski and Assistant Attorney General Dreiband commended the multiple agencies that assisted in this investigation over the past three years including: HSI; IRS-CI; the Department of Justice’s Criminal Division’s Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section; the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division’s Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit; the St. Paul Police Department; the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension’s Minnesota Human Trafficking Investigators Task Force; the Anoka County Sheriff’s Office; the
Cook County (Illinois) Sheriff’s Office; the State Department Diplomatic Security Service; and the International Organized Crime Intelligence and Operations Center (IOC-2). U.S. Attorney MacDonald also thanks the Thai Community Development Center for the support and advocacy they have done on behalf of the victims of this sex trafficking organization.

U.S. Attorney MacDonald, Assistant Attorney General Benczkowski and Assistant Attorney General Dreiband further thanked the trial team led by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Melinda A. Williams and Laura Provinzino, with assistance from HSI Special Agent Tonya Price, IRS-CI Special Agent John Tschida, Senior Investigator Steven Baker of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division’s Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section, and the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division’s Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit for their dedication to the pursuit of justice.

This case is filed as United States v. Michael Morris, et al., 17-cr-107 (DWF/TNL) and United States v. Sumalee Intarathong, et al., 16-cr-257 (DWF/TNL).

**Defendants:**

**MICHAEL J. MORRIS, 65**
Seal Beach, Calif.

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Sex trafficking by use of force, fraud, and coercion, 1 count
- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count
- Conspiracy to use a communication facility to promote prostitution, 1 count

**PAWINEE UNPRADIT, 46**
Dallas, Texas

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count
- Conspiracy to use a communication facility to promote prostitution, 1 count

**SAOWAPHA THINRAM, 44**
Hutto, Texas

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count
- Conspiracy to use a communication facility to promote prostitution, 1 count

**THOUCHARIN RUTTANAMONGKONGUL, 35**
Chicago, Ill.

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count
Conspiracy to use a communication facility to promote prostitution, 1 count

**WARALEE WANLESS, 39**
The Colony, Texas
Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count
- Conspiracy to use a communication facility to promote prostitution, 1 count

**CHATARAK TAUFFLIEB, 52**
San Jose, Calif.
Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**PEERACHET THIPBOONNGAM, 58**
Los Angeles, Calif.
Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**GREGORY ALLEN KIMMY, 38**
Hutto, Texas
Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**WILAIWAN PHIMKHALEE, 40**
Chicago, Ill.
Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**KANYARAT CHAIWIRAT, 52**
Chicago, Ill.
Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**PORNTHEP SUKPRASERT, 42**
Huntington Beach, Calif.
Convicted:

- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**MULCHULEE CHALERMSAKULRAT, 41**
Huntington Beach, Calif.

Convicted:

- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**BHUNNA WIN, 51**
San Diego, Calif.

Convicted:

- Unlicensed money transmitting business, 1 count

**NATCHANOK YUVASUTA, 50**
Los Angeles, Calif.

Convicted:

- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**NATTAYA LEELARUNGRAYAB, 47**
Los Angeles, Calif.

Convicted:

- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**PEERASAK GUNTETONG, 61**
North Hollywood, CA

Convicted:

- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**VEERAPON GHETTALAE, 57**
Lake Elsinore, Calif.

Convicted:

- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**MATTHEW MINTZ, 27**
Chicago, Ill.

Convicted:

- Conspiracy to commit alien harboring, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**MOHIT TANDON, 38**
Burr Ridge, Ill.
Convicted:
  - Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
  - Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

RICHARD ALEXANDER, 53
DeKalb, Ill.
Convicted:
  - Conspiracy to commit marriage fraud, 1 count
  - Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

TANAKRON PATRATH, 60
Houston, Texas
Convicted:
  - Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

PANWAD KHOTPRATOOM, 47
Houston, Texas
Convicted:
  - Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
  - Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

CHABAPRAI BOONLUEA, 44
Winder, Ga.
Convicted:
  - Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
  - Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

NOPPAWAN LERSLURCHACHAI, 37
Lomita, Calif.
Convicted:
  - Sex trafficking by use of force, fraud, and coercion, 1 count
  - Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

WATCHARIN LUAMSEEJUN, 48
Unknown
Convicted:
  - Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
  - Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

PANTILA RODPHOKHA, 33
Mount Prospect, Ill.

Convicted:

- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

SOYSUDA SIANGDANG, 34

Chicago, Ill.

Convicted:

- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
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Convicted:

- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
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TODD VASSEY, 56

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- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
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THI VU, 50

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Convicted:

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JOHN ZBRACKI, 61

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Convicted:

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JOHN NG, 41

Cottage Grove, Minn.

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- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count
PATCHARAPORN SAENGKHAM, 43
Los Angeles, Calif.
Convicted:
  - Conspiracy to enter the United States by means of misrepresentation and concealment of facts, 1 count

CHANANCHIDA SENASU, 42
Dallas, Tex.
Convicted:
  - Conspiracy to enter the United States by means of misrepresentation and concealment of facts, 1 count

YADAPORN PANNGOEN, 32
Chicago, Ill.
Convicted:
  - Conspiracy to enter the United States by means of misrepresentation and concealment of facts, 1 count

CHONTHICHA SOICHAISONG, 38
Austin, Tex.
Convicted:
  - Conspiracy to enter the United States by means of misrepresentation and concealment of facts, 1 count

Topic(s):
Human Trafficking

Component(s):
Civil Rights - Criminal Section
Criminal Division
USAO - Minnesota

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Updated December 13, 2018
THIRTY-SIX DEFENDANTS GUILTY FOR THEIR ROLES IN INTERNATIONAL THAI SEX TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION

MICHAEL MORRIS (65), PAVINEE UNPRADIT (46), SAOWAPHA THINRAM (44), THOCHARIN RUTTANAMONGKONGUL, (35), and WARALEE WANLESS (39), were convicted today by a federal jury for their roles in operating a massive international sex trafficking organization that was responsible for coercing hundreds of Thai women to engage in commercial sex acts across the United States.

The convictions follow a six-week trial before Senior Judge Donovan Frank, in U.S. District Court in St. Paul, Minnesota. Thirty-one defendants previously pleaded guilty for their roles in the sex trafficking organization.

The convictions were announced today by United States Attorney Erica H. MacDonald, Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband for the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division, Assistant Attorney General Brian Benczkowski for the Criminal Division, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Special Agent in Charge, Tracy J. Cormier, IRS Criminal Investigation Supervisory Special Agent, Todd Strom, and Panida Rzonca the Directing Attorney for the Thai Community Development Center.

United States Attorney Erica H. MacDonald said, “More than two years ago, my office filed the first federal indictment against this criminal organization that relied on the sexual exploitation of women for their own financial gain. Since then, our team of prosecutors and investigators systematically dismantled the organization, while seeking justice for every victim. The process has been long, but today’s guilty verdict represents a successful and just outcome. While our work combatting human trafficking continues, this case stands as a powerful example of the Department of Justice’s commitment to achieving justice for victims. I applaud our law enforcement partners for the remarkable dedication and collaboration they have demonstrated throughout this process.”

“The convictions of these defendants close this chapter for law enforcement, however mark only the beginning of the recovery process for the victims,” said Tracy J. Cormier, Special Agent in Charge of HSI St. Paul. “I am extremely proud of the work done by HSI’s special agents, and of the teamwork demonstrated by our law enforcement partners in dismantling this criminal organization. Our communities are safer as a result of this investigation.”
“Sex trafficking is a horrific crime that seeks to erode the human dignity of victims,” said Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband for the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division. “I want to thank U.S. Attorney Erica H. MacDonald, the District of Minnesota’s Anti-Trafficking Coordination Team, HSI St. Paul, IRS Criminal Investigations, the State Department’s Diplomatic Security Service, and other law enforcement and local partners for their hard work on this case which dismantled an extensive transnational trafficking enterprise. The Department of Justice will bring the full force of the law against and perpetrators of sex trafficking crimes.”

“The defendants convicted today participated in a massive yet brutally efficient criminal enterprise that trafficked hundreds of vulnerable Thai women for sexual exploitation and used sophisticated money laundering techniques to conceal and sustain itself,” said Assistant Attorney General Brian A. Benczkowski of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division. “The Criminal Division, through our Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section, is committed to working with our law enforcement partners to dismantle the financial infrastructure supporting criminal organizations such as these.”

“The cruel and illegal actions of the defendants tear at the fabric of our community, causing trauma, fear and anguish both seen and unseen,” said St. Paul Police Chief Todd Axtell. “Thankfully, due to the exceptional work of many law enforcement agencies and their representatives, the guilty will be held accountable for their actions and survivors will get help, support and justice.”

“The guilty verdict of these five individuals received today is the culmination of a large sophisticated international sex trafficking criminal enterprise. This criminal organization exploited women and laundered hundreds of thousands of illicit profits,” stated IRS Criminal Investigation Special Agent in Charge Gabe Grchan. “Pooling the skills of each agency in this complex investigation made a tremendous team including IRS Criminal Investigation who provided the financial expertise to follow the money trail of these criminals. Today’s guilty verdict demonstrates the collective efforts of law enforcement and U.S. Attorney’s Office who brought down an international sex trafficking organization.”

As proven at trial, this criminal organization compelled hundreds of women from Bangkok, Thailand, to engage in commercial sex acts in various cities across the United States, including Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, Phoenix, Washington, D.C., Las Vegas, Houston, Dallas, Seattle, and Austin. The trafficking victims were often from impoverished backgrounds and spoke little or no English. They were coerced to participate in the criminal scheme through misleading promises of a better life in the United States and the ability to provide money to their families in Thailand.

Once in the United States, the victims were sent to houses of prostitution where they were forced to have sex with strangers – every day – for up to 12 hours a day, at times having sex with ten men a day. The victims were isolated from the outside world. They were not allowed to leave the houses of prostitution unless accompanied by a member of the criminal organization. The victims moved around the United States between houses of prostitution in multiple cities. They and their families in Thailand were threatened.
The organization also engaged in widespread visa fraud to facilitate the international transportation of the victims. Traffickers assisted the victims in obtaining fraudulent visas and travel documents by funding false bank accounts, creating fictitious backgrounds and occupations, and instructing the victims to enter into fraudulent marriages to increase the likelihood that their visa applications would be approved. Traffickers also coached the victims as to what to say during their visa interviews. While working to obtain visa documents, traffickers gathered personal information from the victims, including the location of the victims’ families in Thailand. This information was later used to threaten victims who sought to flee the organization in the United States.

The organization dealt primarily in cash and engaged in rampant and sophisticated money laundering in order to promote and conceal illegal profits. The organization used “funnel accounts” to launder and route cash from cities across the U.S. to the money launderers in Los Angeles. To date, investigators have been able to recover $1.5 million in cash and $15 million in money judgments secured through plea agreements. During the extensive investigation, law enforcement traced tens of millions of dollars to the organization. Indeed, at trial, there was testimony that more than $40 million was sent to Thailand by one money launderer alone.

The District of Minnesota is one of six districts designated through a nationwide selection process as a Phase II Anti-Trafficking Coordination Team (ACTeam), an ACTeam Initiative of the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security and Labor. ACTeams focus on developing high-impact human trafficking investigations and prosecutions involving forced labor, international sex trafficking and sex trafficking by force, fraud or coercion through interagency collaboration among federal prosecutors and federal investigative agencies. Today’s convictions validate the continued ACTeam mission—to take on and take down the most entrenched and sophisticated human trafficking organizations that seek to profit from human exploitation.

United States Attorney MacDonald thanks the multiple agencies that assisted in this investigation over the past three years including: Homeland Security Investigations; the Criminal Investigation Division of the IRS; the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division’s Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit; the Department of Justice’s Criminal Division’s Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section; the St. Paul Police Department; the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension’s Minnesota Human Trafficking Investigators Task Force; the Anoka County Sheriff’s Office; the Cook County (Illinois) Sheriff’s Office; the State Department Diplomatic Security Service; and the International Organized Crime Intelligence and Operations Center (IOC-2). United States Attorney MacDonald also thanks the Thai Community Development Center for the support and advocacy they have done on behalf of the victims of this sex trafficking organization.

U.S. Attorney MacDonald further thanked the trial team led by Assistant United States Attorneys Melinda A. Williams and Laura Provinzino, with assistance from Special Agent Tonya Price of Homeland Security Investigations, Special Agent John Tschida with the Criminal Investigation Division of the IRS, Senior Investigator Steven Baker with Justice Department’s Criminal Division’s Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section, and the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division’s Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit for their dedication to the pursuit of justice.

This case is filed as United States v. Michael Morris, et al., 17-cr-107 (DWF/TKL) and United States v. Sumalee Intarathong, et al., 16-cr-257 (DWF/TKL).
Defendants:

MICHAEL J. MORRIS, 65
Seal Beach, Calif.

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Sex trafficking by use of force, fraud, and coercion, 1 count
- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count
- Conspiracy to use a communication facility to promote prostitution, 1 count

PAWINEE UNPRADIT, 46
Dallas, Texas

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count
- Conspiracy to use a communication facility to promote prostitution, 1 count

SAOWAPHA THINRAM, 44
Hutto, Texas

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count
- Conspiracy to use a communication facility to promote prostitution, 1 count

THOUCHARIN RUTTANAMONGKONGUL, 35
Chicago, Ill.

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count
- Conspiracy to use a communication facility to promote prostitution, 1 count

WARALEE WANLESS, 39
The Colony, Texas

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count
• Conspiracy to use a communication facility to promote prostitution, 1 count

CHATARAK TAUFFLIEB, 52
San Jose, Calif.

Convicted:
• Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
• Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

PEERACHET THIPBOONNGAM, 58
Los Angeles, Calif.

Convicted:
• Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
• Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

GREGORY ALLEN KIMMY, 38
Hutto, Texas

Convicted:
• Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
• Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

WILAIWAN PHIMKHALEE, 40
Chicago, Ill.

Convicted:
• Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
• Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

KANYARAT CHAIWIRAT, 52
Chicago, Ill.

Convicted:
• Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
• Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

PORNTHEP SUKPRASERT, 42
Huntington Beach, Calif.

Convicted:
• Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

MULCHULEE CHALERMSAKULRAT, 41
Huntington Beach, Calif.
Convicted:
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**BHUNNA WIN, 51**
San Diego, Calif.

Convicted:
- Unlicensed money transmitting business, 1 count

**NATCHANOK YUVASUTA, 50**
Los Angeles, Calif.

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**NATTAYA LEELARUNGRAYAB, 47**
Los Angeles, Calif.

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**PEERASAK GUNTETONG, 61**
North Hollywood, CA

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**VEERAPON GHETTALAE, 57**
Lake Elsinore, Calif.

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**MATTHEW MINTZ, 27**
Chicago, Ill.

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit alien harboring, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**MOHIT TANDON, 38**
Burr Ridge, Ill.

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit transportation to engage in prostitution, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**RICHARD ALEXANDER, 53**
DeKalb, Ill.

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit marriage fraud, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**TANAKRON PATRATH, 60**
Houston, Texas

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**PANWAD KHOTPRATOOM, 47**
Houston, Texas

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**CHABAPRAI BOONLUEA, 44**
Winder, Ga.

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**NOPPAWAN LERSLURCHACHAI, 37**
Lomita, Calif.

Convicted:
- Sex trafficking by use of force, fraud, and coercion, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**WATCHARIN LUAMSEEJUN, 48**
Unknown

Convicted:
- Conspiracy to commit sex trafficking, 1 count
- Conspiracy to engage in money laundering, 1 count

**PANTILA RODPHOKHA, 33**
Mount Prospect, Ill.
Convicted:
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United States Attorney’s Office, District of Minnesota: (612) 664-5600