



U.S. Department of Justice

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Southern District of Mississippi

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**HOWARD INDUSTRIES HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER CHARGED
WITH CONSPIRACY AND EMPLOYEE VERIFICATION FRAUD**

Hattiesburg, Miss - STAN HARRIS, Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi, and Special Agent in Charge MICHAEL A. HOLT, Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, announced the indictment of **JOSE HUMBERTO GONZÁLEZ**, Human Resources Manager for Howard Industries, Inc., in Laurel, Mississippi. **GONZÁLEZ** was charged in a 25-count indictment with conspiracy and employee verification fraud in connection with the employment of illegal aliens at the company's transformer manufacturing facility in Laurel. **GONZÁLEZ** made his initial appearance earlier today before the Honorable Michael T. Parker, United States Magistrate Judge, at the federal courthouse in Hattiesburg.

GONZÁLEZ's indictment follows an immigration sweep of the Laurel plant last August, during which 595 illegal aliens were subject to administrative arrest during the agency's largest workplace enforcement action. Of those arrested, nine were

charged criminally with aggravated identity theft and ultimately pled guilty to federal identity fraud charges.

"ICE aggressively targets employers who egregiously violate immigration laws by knowingly employing an illegal alien workforce," said MICHAEL A. HOLT, Special Agent-in-Charge of ICE's Office of Investigations in New Orleans. "This indictment demonstrates firsthand how ICE agents use our investigative tools to pursue those who take advantage of illegal labor for personal profit."

In the indictment unsealed today, **GONZÁLEZ** was charged with conspiring to commit multiple offenses against the United States, including encouraging illegal aliens to reside in the United States, attempting to conceal and harbor illegal aliens, and falsely attesting to the validity of employment-related documents. The indictment alleges that it was a part of the conspiracy that **GONZÁLEZ**, on behalf of Howard Industries, would routinely hire illegal aliens and in the process of such hiring would accept false identity documents, including alien registration receipt cards and Social Security cards. The indictment further states that, as part of the conspiracy, defendant **GONZÁLEZ** would submit Social Security numbers provided to him by applicants at the Laurel plant to the Social Security Administration to verify their numbers and, after being notified by the Social Security Administration that the

Social Security numbers of such applicants were not found to be valid, **GONZÁLEZ** would nonetheless hire and continue to employ such persons. As charged, it was also a part of the conspiracy that **GONZÁLEZ** would instruct employees to obtain alternative identity documents which he knew falsely represented their true identities. The indictment further charges that it was also a part of the conspiracy that **GONZÁLEZ** would assure Spanish-speaking foreign nationals working at the Laurel plant that they would be warned if immigration authorities were coming to the plant.

In addition to the conspiracy charge, **GONZÁLEZ** was charged with 24 counts of falsely certifying to the employment eligibility of job applicants and employees. The indictment charges that, on various dates, **GONZÁLEZ** falsely certified, under penalty of perjury, on Form I-9 Employment Eligibility Verifications that he had examined the documents listed on the Form I-9 and determined them to be genuine and that, to the best of his knowledge, the applicant was eligible to work in the United States, whereas in fact he had been notified by the Social Security Administration that the Social Security numbers of such applicants were not found to be valid.

Defendant **GONZÁLEZ** faces a maximum of five years of imprisonment on each count. In addition to possible

imprisonment, the defendant faces a maximum fine of \$250,000, and three years of supervised release for each count.

Along with Acting United States Attorney STAN HARRIS, Assistant United States Attorneys GAINES CLEVELAND and MIKE HURST are the prosecutors in charge of the case.

Mr. HARRIS praised the efforts of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement for its diligent work in the investigation of this matter.

Acting United States Attorney HARRIS stressed that this indictment represents an accusation only and all defendants are entitled to a presumption of innocence.

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