



*United States Attorney
District of New Jersey*

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**TOGOLESE MAN SENTENCED TO MORE THAN 24 YEARS IN PRISON FOR
FORCED LABOR OF YOUNG WEST AFRICAN WOMEN IN HAIR BRAIDING
SALONS IN NEWARK AND EAST ORANGE, NEW JERSEY**

Defendant Also Ordered to Pay Victims Over \$3.9 Million in Missed Wages

NEWARK, N.J. – A second man from Togo was sentenced today for his participation in an operation in which dozens of women and girls were forced to work at hair braiding salons in Newark and East Orange, New Jersey without pay for the financial benefit of the defendants, United States Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Lassissi Afolabi, 47, was sentenced to 292 months in prison for conspiring with others – including his ex-wife Akouavi Kpade Afolabi and her son, Dereck Hounakey – to commit forced labor; traffic with respect to forced labor; hold visas and identification; commit forced labor with aggravated sexual abuse; and travel with intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct with a minor.

Afolabi previously pleaded guilty to the charges before United States District Judge Jose L. Linares, who also imposed the sentence today in Newark federal court.

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

At his plea hearing, Lassissi Afolabi admitted that from October 2002 through September 2007, he engaged in a conspiracy to obtain the forced labor of a number of women and girls whom Akouavi Kpade Afolabi had brought over from Togo with fraudulent visas. Once the young women entered the United States, Lassissi Afolabi and his wife required them to work at hair braiding salons for up to 14 hours per day, six or seven days a week. The victims were also required to turn over all of their earnings, including their tips, to the defendants. The defendants did not allow the young women to keep their passports or identification; to speak with their families outside of the defendants' presence; or to make any outside friends. They were rarely permitted to leave Lassissi Afolabi's residence other than to work. When a young woman broke a rule she was punished, often physically, by one of the Afolabis. Lassissi Afolabi also admitted to forcing at least one victim to have sex with him during the course of the conspiracy and to taking one girl, who was under the age of 18, from New Jersey to North Carolina for the purpose of having sex with her.

In addition to the prison term, Judge Linares sentenced Lassissi Afolabi to lifetime of supervised release and ordered him to pay restitution to each of the victims, in the total amount of \$3,949,140.80. The restitution amount includes the wages the victims should have been paid

during their servitude, calculated under the Fair Labor Standards Act, which provides for payment of minimum wage and overtime, as well as compensatory damages for the delay in receiving their wages.

Hounakey, 33, was sentenced to 55 months in prison on June 28, 2010, for conspiring with others, including his mother and her ex-husband, to commit forced labor, traffic with respect to forced labor, and hold visas and identification. The remaining defendants, Geoffry Kouevi and Akouavi Kpade Afolabi, who were convicted after separate jury trials, are scheduled to be sentenced on July 20, 2010, and September 1, 2010, respectively.

U.S. Attorney Fishman credited special agents of the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Newark, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Peter T. Edge, as well as agents of the U.S. Department of Labor, Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection, and the U.S. Department of State for the investigation leading to today's sentence.

ICE encourages public involvement by reporting suspected cases of trafficking to its tipline: 1-866-DHS-2-ICE.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Shana W. Chen and Nancy Hoppock of the United States Attorney's Office Criminal Division in Newark.

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Defense counsel: John P. McGovern, Esq., Newark, New Jersey