



Department of Justice

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FORMER WRESTLER SENTENCED TO LIFE ON FEDERAL SEX TRAFFICKING & FORCED LABOR CHARGES

Ring-Leader In Human Trafficking Organization Sentenced

Atlanta, GA--Former professional wrestler HARRISON NORRIS, Jr., 42, a/k/a "Hardbody Harrison," of Cartersville, Georgia, was sentenced today to life in prison for committing multiple violations of federal sex trafficking and forced labor statutes in connection with a scheme to force women into prostitution.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias said of the sentencing, "Norris ran a forced prostitution ring in which women were sexually assaulted, held in debt, and forced to work and perform sex acts against their will. This terrible conduct deserved the severe sentence handed down today. Human trafficking removes an individual's freedom to choose and can have long-lasting psychological effects on the victims. In this case numerous victims were brave enough to come forward and testify at trial against their captor and abuser, Harrison Norris. The jury specifically found aggravated sexual abuse by Norris and the judge entered a sentence that we hope will deter others from exploiting their fellow human beings."

Grace Chung Becker, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division in Washington D.C. said, "These vulnerable victims were lured by false promises to train as professional wrestlers and suffered horrific physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. I commend these women for coming forward and helping the Department hold accountable those who engaged in this shameful conduct."

NORRIS was sentenced to life in prison. There is no parole in the federal system. NORRIS was convicted on November 22, 2007, following a two-and-a-half week long jury trial, on 24 counts including conspiracy, four counts of holding women in a condition of peonage, five counts of forced labor, five counts of trafficking with respect to peonage, five counts of commercial sex trafficking, three counts of witness tampering, and one count of obstructing enforcement of a peonage investigation.

According to United States Attorney Nahmias and the information presented at trial and in court: Since 2001, NORRIS had been running a prostitution business in the Atlanta area. From April 2004 to August 2005, NORRIS and his co-conspirator Aimee Allen recruited and forced women, many of whom were poor, homeless or addicted to drugs, to work for NORRIS as prostitutes and servants in his two Cartersville, Georgia homes. NORRIS lured several victims to his homes by falsely promising that he would train them to become successful wrestlers in his female wrestling company. Allen, who pleaded guilty and cooperated with the government, testified against NORRIS at trial and was previously sentenced to 2 years and 10 months in prison. One of Allen's key roles in the conspiracy was to convince victims that NORRIS's wrestling company was legitimate. According to the evidence at trial, another co-conspirator, Cedric Jackson also kidnapped at least one victim and provided her to NORRIS. Jackson was previously sentenced to 5 years in prison.

Witnesses at trial described beatings NORRIS administered and threats he made to force the women to do as he instructed. On one occasion, NORRIS head-butted a woman and threatened to throw her through a hotel window when she would not engage in sex with two customers. NORRIS also ordered other women loyal to him and to his organization to sexually assault the victims. Witnesses testified that NORRIS isolated the victims from their families and friends and monitored them at all times to prevent their escape. NORRIS's control over the victims included a strict military structure that he imposed in his home. The defendant assigned each of his victims to a "squad" overseen by a "team leader," a woman conspiring with NORRIS to keep the victims in servitude. Allen was one such team leader.

Numerous witnesses also testified about events called "cut parties" during which the victims were forced to have sex with numerous men and sometimes with other women. Evidence at trial established that forced acts of prostitution occurred at nightclubs, in apartments, at hotels, in the back of NORRIS' truck, and in other locations in North Carolina and Northern Georgia. The profits from NORRIS's forced prostitution business were collected by him and held in his safe, along with the victims' identification and cellular phones, where the victims had no access to their belongings. The victims also testified that they were forced to have sex with NORRIS.

In addition to forcing the women to work as prostitutes, NORRIS made the victims work in and around his two homes in Cartersville. Witnesses testified that NORRIS required the victims to perform domestic labor on a daily basis, including hauling trees, laying sod, and painting. The evidence at trial further established that NORRIS set strict rules and fined the women for such infractions as talking too much or failing to exercise. In addition, NORRIS kept the women financially indebted to him by charging them for food, medicine, rent, and cigarettes. NORRIS then told the victims that they could not leave until their debts were paid, all the while continuing to increase the debt he claimed he was owed.

Human trafficking prosecutions such as this one are a top priority in the Department of Justice. In the last seven fiscal years, the Civil Rights Division, in conjunction with the U.S. Attorney's Offices, has increased by nearly seven-fold the number of human trafficking cases filed in court as compared to the previous seven fiscal years. In fiscal year 2007, the Department obtained a record number of convictions in human trafficking prosecutions.

This case was investigated by of the Federal Bureau of Investigation with assistance from Smyrna Police Department and Bartow County Sheriff's Office.

Assistant United States Attorney Susan Coppedge and DOJ Civil Rights Attorney Karima Maloney prosecuted the case.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias (pronounced NAH-me-us), United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan.