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**WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO MILLION-DOLLAR FRAUD
OF IMMIGRATION APPLICATIONS**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and KEVIN DELLI-COLLI, the Acting Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Department of Homeland Security's United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") announced that MARIA MAXIMO, 56, pleaded guilty today in Manhattan federal court to charges relating to two schemes to defraud immigrants by charging them between \$500 and \$2,500 to file immigration applications that MAXIMO knew were baseless and would ultimately be denied. According to the felony Information to which MAXIMO pleaded guilty, and other documents publicly filed in this case:

Between June 2004 and early 2005, MAXIMO, on behalf of approximately 500 illegal immigrants, prepared applications to a purported "work permit program" through which, MAXIMO claimed, the immigrants would receive valid United States work permits. MAXIMO charged \$500 for the preparation of each of these approximately 500 applications. United States Citizenship and Information Services ("USCIS") had no such "work permit program" and offers employment identification cards only to immigrants who have visas allowing them to work in the United States, or who are applying for immigration status which, if granted, would allow them to work. As a result, USCIS denied the approximately 500 invalid work permit applications.

In another facet of the scheme, between May 2005 and January 2006, MAXIMO charged approximately 1,700 people between \$500 and \$2,500 for the preparation of applications to what she promoted as a "legalization program" open to virtually any illegal immigrant. MAXIMO claimed that through the "legalization program" applicants could receive work permits and ultimately

green cards. Instead, MAXIMO filed applications for what is known as the LULAC program (named after a lawsuit involving the League of United Latin American Citizens), a limited amnesty program of which one of the eligibility requirements is that applicants have resided in the United States since at least January 1, 1982. Nevertheless, MAXIMO told applicants who had resided in the United States for a shorter period that they were eligible for a green card under the LULAC program and submitted applications on their behalf. As a result, at the time charges were filed against MAXIMO on March 29, 2006, USCIS had already rejected more than 750 of MAXIMO's LULAC applications on the ground that the immigrant had not lived in the United States since 1982. Hundreds of additional applications are in the process of being evaluated and appear not to be legitimate.

MAXIMO received well in excess of \$1,000,000 from these immigration schemes.

MAXIMO was arrested in connection with these charges on April 4, 2006. She pleaded guilty today to two counts of mail fraud -- one for the "work permit" scheme and one for the "legalization" scheme. During her plea, MAXIMO admitted that she knew some of the applicants did not qualify for the programs and that she failed to tell the applicants that they did not qualify but rather took their money and submitted their applications to USCIS.

On each count, MAXIMO faces a maximum sentence of 20 years' imprisonment and a maximum fine of the greater of \$250,000, or twice the gross gain or gross loss from the offense. MAXIMO may also be required to make restitution to her victims and forfeit to the United States the proceeds of her schemes. To date, the Government has seized approximately \$998,000 in funds that constitute or are derived from proceeds traceable to the commission of the offenses.

Mr. GARCIA praised the efforts of ICE for the investigation of this case. In addition, Mr. GARCIA thanked USCIS, the Bronx District Attorney's Office, the New York State Police Department, and the New York Attorney General for their assistance in this matter.

Assistant United States Attorneys ARLO DEVLIN-BROWN and MARGARET GARNETT are in charge of the prosecution and Assistant United States Attorney SEETHA RAMACHANDRAN is in charge of the forfeiture proceedings.

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