



***United States Attorney  
Southern District of New York***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
OCTOBER 26, 2007**

**CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
YUSILL SCRIBNER  
REBEKAH CARMICHAEL  
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE  
(212) 637-2600**

**HEAD OF BRONX NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION SENTENCED  
TO 17 AND A HALF YEARS IN PRISON FOR  
FRAUD ON IMMIGRATION APPLICANTS**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and SALVATORE DALESSANDRO, 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, 54, was sentenced today in Manhattan federal court to 210 months in prison on charges relating to schemes to defraud more than 2,000 immigrants by charging them between \$500 and \$2,500 to file immigration applications that MAXIMO knew were baseless and would ultimately be denied. The sentence was imposed by United States District Judge LEWIS A. KAPLAN.

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 approximately 500 applications. MAXIMO advertised the "work permit program" in part through flyers that indicated that almost any illegal immigrant could get a work permit by submitting an application with just a few basic biographical documents. United States Citizenship and Information Services ("USCIS") had no such "work permit program" and offers employment authorization 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 submitted by MAXIMO.

In another facet of the scheme, between May 2005 and January 2006, MAXIMO charged approximately 1,800 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. There was no such "legalization program." 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. None of these approximately 1,800 LULAC applications have been approved.

At her sentencing today, MAXIMO was ordered to forfeit \$2 million in proceeds from the scheme, including nearly \$1,000,000 in accounts seized by the Government at the time of her arrest on April 4, 2006. MAXIMO was also ordered to make full restitution to her victims, in an amount that will be set by the court at a later date.

MAXIMO pleaded guilty on March 16, 2007, 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.

In imposing the sentence of 210 months in prison, Judge KAPLAN stated that "this was a truly horrible crime," and "one of the greatest cons I've ever seen." Noting that this is "a nation of immigrants," Judge KAPLAN commented on "the desperation about coming to the United States and staying in the United States," and stated that MAXIMO "in the most cynical, cold-blooded, vicious way took advantage of that desperation."

Mr. GARCIA praised ICE for its work in 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.

07-260

###