



U.S. Department of Justice

**RONALD W. SHARPE**  
*United States Attorney*  
*District of the Virgin Islands*

*Ron de Lugo Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse*  
*5500 Veterans Drive, Suite 260*  
*Charlotte Amalie*  
*St. Thomas, VI 00802-6424*

---

## **PRESS RELEASE**

---

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 8, 2010

### **Three VI Residents Convicted in Immigration Fraud**

**St. Thomas, USVI** – After a one-day trial in federal court Tuesday on St. Thomas, the jury convicted 31-year-old Abel Amin Gonell Artiles of the Dominican Republic of fraudulent use of a Social Security number, United States Attorney Ronald W. Sharpe and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Acting Special Agent-in-Charge Roberto Escobar announced today.

Artiles was the last defendant to be convicted in a fraud investigation involving two other individuals. Colombian national Dora Bibiana Ramirez Laverde, 34, was convicted of making a false statement to Immigration officials on June 2 following a two-day jury trial in district court on St. Thomas. On May 27, 2010, St. Croix native Joshua Allen Chitolie, 32, pleaded guilty in district court on St. Croix to making a false statement to a federal agent.

Evidence presented at trial established that on September 22, 2004, Laverde married Chitolie during a civil ceremony on St. Croix. A few months later, Chitolie filed a visa petition with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) seeking to confer the benefits of citizenship upon Laverde.

The evidence presented at trial showed that while the petition was pending, CIS learned that Laverde had given birth to a child. In order to help establish that Laverde's marriage to Chitolie

was a bona fide marriage and not a marriage of convenience in order to circumvent U.S. Immigration laws, CIS requested that Chitolie submit to a paternity test to prove that he is the biological father of the child born to Laverde.

After the tests were performed, the lab sent a copy of the DNA test report and a photo of the male who arrived with the child for testing to CIS. A review of the photograph by CIS revealed that Chitolie was not the person who appeared at the lab for testing. Instead, it was Artilles, who is the natural father of the child, using Chitolie's identity and Social Security number.

When CIS interviewed Laverde, however, she stated that she accompanied her husband, Chitolie, to the lab for him and the child to be tested. Later in the interview, Laverde admitted that it was Artilles, her boyfriend and father of her child, who submitted himself for testing using her husband, Chitolie's identity. Chitolie, who also told CIS during an interview that he took Laverde's child to the lab for testing, admitted during his plea hearing that he made a false statement to CIS.

Each defendant faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison. No sentencing date has been set for Laverde. Chitolie's sentencing is scheduled for September 9, 2010 in district court on St. Croix before the Honorable Raymond Finch. Artilles' sentencing is scheduled for September 15 in district court on St. Thomas before the Honorable Curtis V. Gomez.

This case was investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. It was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Denise A. Hinds.