

U.S. v. Jorge Sosa: In 2013, following a trial by HRSP and the U.S. Attorney’s office in the Central District of California, Sosa was convicted of naturalization fraud for concealing his involvement in a massacre in Guatemala. Sosa was a former commanding officer in a special military force that perpetrated a notorious massacre in 1982 in the village of Dos Erres, Guatemala. Sosa was sentenced to 10 years in prison and stripped of his U.S. citizenship.

U.S. v. Roy M. Belfast, Jr. a/k/a Chuckie Taylor: The first federal prosecution for torture involved the American son of former Liberian President Charles Taylor. During his father’s administration, Taylor commanded a Liberian security force that tortured civilians. Taylor was convicted after a jury trial and was sentenced in 2009 to 97 years in prison.

United States v. Eric Newman: In 2019, a Kansas man pleaded guilty to murdering his girlfriend by pushing her over a balcony railing on a Carnival Cruise ship, causing her to fall to her death. At the time, the cruise ship was sailing in international water, approximately 30 nautical miles from New Smyrna Beach, Florida. A federal judge sentenced Newman to 12 years in prison.

United States v. Zia Zafar: In 2018, A U.S. national and former medical student was sentenced to 22 years in prison for the attempted murder of a U.S. diplomat stationed at the U.S. Consulate in Guadalajara, Mexico. Zafar, then living in Guadalajara, surveilled, followed, and shot his victim in the chest. The diplomat survived the shooting, but the bullet remains lodged in his spinal column, as it was deemed too dangerous to remove.

U.S. v. Fernando Rivera Weir, et al. (Operation Turbo): Between 2017-19, three Colombian nationals were charged and convicted with human smuggling resulting in death, extradited, convicted, and ultimately sentenced to 50, 45, and 8-year jail sentences, respectively. While smuggling three Cuban nationals from Turbo, Colombia to Panama, with an ultimate destination of the United States, two of the defendants raped a woman and murdered her and another man in the group. The third defendant was the smuggler who made the arrangements to transport the individuals.

Operation Island Express: These cases targeted an identity and document trafficking organization (DTO) that operated in Puerto Rico, over twenty-six states, and the Dominican Republic (DR). The DTO trafficked the identities of Puerto Rican U.S. citizens and their birth certificates and Social Security cards, primarily to undocumented non-citizens from the DR, Mexico, Guatemala, and Colombia. The customers used these documents to pose as those citizens and commit further identification, financial, passport, and other fraud. In multiple indictments filed in 2012 and 2014, the defendants were charged with conspiracy to commit human smuggling for financial gain, conspiracy to commit identification fraud, and numerous counts of aggravated identity theft. As of 2019, 69 defendants in these related cases have been convicted.

U.S. v. Friedrich Berger: In 2020, a U.S. immigration judge ordered Berger’s removal to Germany, on the basis of his service in 1945 as an armed guard of concentration camp prisoners in the Neuengamme Concentration Camp system, which the judge ruled constituted assistance in Nazi -sponsored persecution.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE CRIMINAL DIVISION



HUMAN RIGHTS AND SPECIAL PROSECUTIONS SECTION (HRSP)

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Background

The Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section (HRSP) is a component of the Criminal Division of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) in Washington, D.C. It was created in March 2010 by merging the Domestic Security Section and the Office of Special Investigations.

HRSP's responsibilities include enforcing federal criminal laws relating to:

- serious human rights violations such as torture, genocide, war crimes, female genital mutilation, and recruitment or use of child soldiers and immigration and naturalization fraud crimes involving concealment of past human rights abuses;
- international human smuggling and other immigration-related offenses; and
- international violent crimes, particularly those involving U.S. government employees and contractors overseas.

HRSP prosecutes cases, primarily in partnership with United States Attorneys' Offices (USAOs), works on policy matters, and assists U.S. and foreign prosecutors. HRSP regularly works with law enforcement officials in the Department of Justice, other federal departments, and foreign governments. The Section works especially closely with Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI); Customs and Border Protection (CBP); the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) and other State Department components; and various law enforcement agencies within the Department of Defense. HRSP also coordinates with DOJ's National Security Division and many other Criminal Division sections.

Human Rights Violations

HRSP investigates and prosecutes human rights violators. Where federal jurisdiction exists, this effort includes the prosecution of individuals who engaged in torture, war crimes, genocide,

female genital mutilation, and the use or recruitment of child soldiers. HSI and FBI are the principal law enforcement agencies with which HRSP works in pursuing these cases.

HRSP pursues accountability for human rights abusers in a variety of ways. In addition to prosecution for the substantive offenses, HRSP prosecutes immigration and naturalization fraud related to efforts to conceal an abuser's background, trains prosecutors and agents on human rights law, and conducts outreach to non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

HRSP is involved in a coordinated effort with other federal entities to ensure that the United States does not become a safe haven for human rights violators. In this work, HRSP has frequent contact with foreign governments, international tribunals, and NGOs. HRSP plays an important role in the work of the interagency Atrocities Prevention Task Force, to coordinate a "whole-of-government" approach to the prevention of, and response to, mass atrocities.

HRSP is also responsible for the identification, investigation, civil prosecution, and removal or extradition of participants in World War II-era, Nazi-sponsored acts of persecution.

Human Smuggling Crimes

HRSP investigates and prosecutes complex immigration offenses that undermine the integrity of our nation's borders and endanger national security as well as the lives of smuggled persons. HRSP targets international criminal networks involved in smuggling of persons and trafficking fraudulent travel and identification documents. HRSP places particular emphasis on dismantling international networks that pose serious humanitarian concerns, and those that terrorists and other criminals could exploit to enter the U.S. without detection.

HRSP helps lead Joint Task Force Alpha, the DOJ/DHS human smuggling and trafficking task force created by the Attorney General in 2021 to target the most pernicious smuggling networks in the Northern Triangle Countries and Mexico that impact the Southwest Border.

HRSP is co-chair of the Human Smuggling and Trafficking Inter-Agency Working Group (IWG), which coordinates U.S. government and foreign partner efforts to combat human smuggling, illicit immigration activities, and related transnational organized crime. Working closely with HSI through the Extraterritorial Criminal Travel Strike Force (ECT), HRSP leads prosecutions of cases involving IWG targets and other significant smugglers. HRSP also focuses on large-scale and multi-district immigration and identification document fraud networks.

HRSP partners with and provides guidance to USAOs and investigating agencies, and coordinates with overseas counterparts to support, where appropriate, foreign investigations and prosecutions of targets of interest to the United States.

International Violent and Serious Crimes

HRSP prosecutes non-terrorism-related crimes of violence and other serious criminal offenses occurring internationally. Generally, such offenses include sexual assault, murder, and domestic violence, and involve a U.S. victim or perpetrator. The offenses frequently occur on U.S. embassy grounds or in embassy housing, and often involve U.S. government employees or contractors.

HRSP serves as DOJ's primary point of contact for matters arising under the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act (MEJA) and has extensive expertise in cases involving the Special Maritime and Territorial Jurisdiction (SMTJ) of the United States. HRSP also has significant expertise as to offenses occurring on maritime vessels and onboard aircraft.

Select Cases

U.S. v. Mergia Negussie Habteyes: In 2019, Negussie was convicted of unlawful procurement of naturalization, sentenced to 37 months of imprisonment, and stripped of his U.S. citizenship based on his participation in the persecution of political detainees in Ethiopia during a period of brutal violence in the late 1970s known as the Red Terror.