



# Department of Justice

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## **ROMANIAN NATIONALS INDICTED FOR RUNNING INTERNET SCAM THAT PURPORTED TO BENEFIT HURRICANE KATRINA VICTIMS**

LOS ANGELES — Two Romanian nationals were indicted today on charges of wire fraud and identity fraud related to a \$150,000 Internet scheme that duped victims into believing they were providing assistance to Hurricane Katrina relief organizations.

Teodor Manolache, 29, and Leontin Salageanu, 26, of Northridge, Calif., were named in a 10-count indictment returned today by a federal grand jury in Los Angeles. Salageanu, who was arrested on a criminal complaint on Sept. 19, 2006 and subsequently released on bond, is scheduled to be arraigned on the indictment on Oct. 16, 2006. An arrest warrant has been issued for Manolache, who previously resided in Northridge and may now be in the Miami area.

The indictment alleges that Manolache, Salageanu and others were involved in an Internet scam that defrauded victims across the United States by holding bogus auctions on eBay, Yahoo! Auctions and Autotrader.com. The conspirators posted items for sale that were never intended to be sold, then collected money from the “successful” bidders. The victims were instructed by the online sellers to send their payment by Western Union to circumvent online payment systems. Manolache and Salageanu then went to Western Union locations in the Los Angeles area and, using false identification, collected the victims’ money. None of the victims received the items they had purchased.

As part of the scheme, the online sellers often masqueraded as Hurricane Katrina relief organizations.

Between October 2005 and February 2006, the Internet Crime Complaint Center referred to the FBI 56 incidents of Internet fraud in which victim buyers were deceived and defrauded by sellers purporting to be collecting money for Hurricane Katrina victim relief. These fraudulent auctions resulted in losses of more than \$150,000. One victim who bid on a motorcycle in an online auction received an email stating: “This is a charity auction in aid of people from New Orleans, which as you well know has been terribly devastated by hurricane Katrina. The auction is managed by AMRF Relief Foundation together with Yahoo! Auctions. Thanks to your outpouring of support, a greater humanitarian disaster will be averted.”

The 10-count indictment charges Manolache and Salageanu with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and identity fraud. Manolache is also charged with four counts of wire fraud and one count of identity fraud, and Salageanu is charged with three counts of wire fraud and one count of identity fraud. Both defendants are charged with one count of social security fraud stemming from

Manolache's use of Salageanu's Social Security number when Manolache applied for work at Prego Restaurant in Beverly Hills. If convicted, the statutory maximum sentences that can be imposed is five years for the conspiracy count, 20 years for each wire fraud count, 10 years for each identity fraud count, and five years for the social security fraud count.

An indictment contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in court.

This case is the result of an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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