



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

MATT J. WHITWORTH

Contact Don Ledford, Public Affairs • (816) 426-4220 • 400 East Ninth Street, Room 5510 • Kansas City, MO 64106
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow/index.html

APRIL 22, 2009
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ETHNIC GROCERY OWNER INDICTED FOR LAUNDERING DRUG-TRAFFICKING MONEY, STRUCTURING FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Matt J. Whitworth, Acting United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that the owner of The African Market in Kansas City, Mo., was indicted by a federal grand jury today for structuring financial transactions and laundering the proceeds of illegal drug trafficking.

Emmanuel Chinedu Okonta, 48, of Kansas City, Mo., was charged in a 13-count indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Kansas City. **Okonta** owns West African Groceries, which does business as The African Market, an ethnic grocery store in Kansas City.

Today's indictment alleges that **Okonta** structured or assisted in structuring a series of financial transactions totaling \$100,000 for the purpose of evading federal reporting requirements. On each of five separate occasions in November and December 2005, **Okonta** sent eight wire transfers of \$2,500 each to China via Western Union.

Under federal law, cash transactions totaling more than \$10,000 must be reported on a Cash Transaction Report and suspicious cash transfers totaling more than \$2,000 must be reported on a Suspicious Activity Report. Money transfers in excess of \$3,000 must be documented.

Today's indictment also charges **Okonta** with eight counts of money laundering related to a series of MoneyGram wire transfers to Los Angeles, Calif., and McAllen, Texas, in June 2007. Those wire transfers, in amounts of either \$2,750 or \$2,800, allegedly represented the proceeds of illegal drug trafficking.

Today's indictment also contains a forfeiture provision, which would require **Okonta** to forfeit to the government \$100,000, representing the amount that was illegally structured, as well as \$22,200, representing the amount involved in the money laundering allegations.

Whitworth cautioned that the charges contained in this indictment are simply accusations, and not evidence of guilt. Evidence supporting the charges must be presented to a federal trial jury, whose duty is to determine guilt or innocence.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Curt Bohling. It was investigated by IRS-Criminal Investigation.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow/index.html