

The United States Attorney's Office

Southern District of Florida

Press Release

TWO LA BAMBA CHECK CASHING EMPLOYEES PLEAD GUILTY IN TAX FRAUD CASE

June 16, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jeffrey H. Sloman, Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, and Daniel W. Auer, Special Agent in Charge, Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation Division, announced that defendants **Jose Jorge Chaoui**, 48, and **Alfredo Filomeno Gonzalez**, 47, salaried employees of the **Maytemar Corporation, d/b/a "La Bamba Check Cashing"** ("La Bamba"), pled guilty this morning before U.S. District Court Judge Joan A. Lenard for their participation in a tax fraud scheme involving La Bamba. Sentencing is scheduled for September 1, 2009.

Financial institutions, including check cashing stores like La Bamba, are required under the Bank Secrecy Act and federal regulations to file CTRs with the Treasury Department for any cash transaction, such as cashing a check, in an amount over \$10,000. Before concluding any transaction for which a CTR is required, the financial institution must verify and accurately record the identity, social security and/or tax identification number of any person or entity on whose behalf the transaction is being conducted.

Defendants Alfredo Filomeno Gonzalez and **Jose Jorge Chaoui** were employees of La Bamba, handling and cashing checks delivered to the business. As compliance officer at La Bamba, defendant Chaoui was required by law to develop, implement, and maintain an effective anti-money laundering and "Know Your Customer" program. Gonzalez was a supervisor at the main office of La Bamba.

According to evidence produced during the La Bamba trial, Juan Rene Caro, the owner of La Bamba, and other co-conspirators, used various shell corporations that purported to be in the construction business in order to conceal the true nature of the financial transactions conducted at La Bamba. In truth, none of these shell corporations were legitimate construction companies. Caro and La Bamba were convicted following a three month trial that ended on February 9, 2009. Caro faces a maximum of 5 years' imprisonment on the conspiracy charge, and 10 years' imprisonment on each substantive charge. He is scheduled to be sentenced on June 22, 2009. The company, La Bamba, faces a \$500,000 fine on each count of conviction.

Specifically, Alfredo Filomeno Gonzalez and Jose Jorge Chaoui pled guilty to impeding and obstructing internal revenue laws when they, on behalf of La Bamba, accepted, cashed and processed \$132,700,000 in checks payable to these shell corporations, in most cases retaining a percentage of the face value of the check as a fee for La Bamba's services. As a result, Gonzalez and Chaoui caused La Bamba to file CTRs with the Treasury Department that falsely stated that the parties involved in these check cashing transactions were the shell corporations and their nominee owners. The defendants thus misrepresented to the IRS the true source of the cash and the true identities of the individuals conducting the check cashing transactions.

Mr. Sloman commended the investigative efforts of the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation Division, and its SAR Review Task Force. This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Wilfredo Fernandez and DOJ Tax Attorney Steven D. Grimberg.

A copy of this press release may be found on the website of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida at <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/fls>. Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Southern District of Florida at <http://www.flsd.uscourts.gov> or on <http://pacer.flsd.uscourts.gov>.

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