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BOLINGBROOK WOMAN INDICTED IN ADOPTIVE PARENT AND CHILD CARE FRAUD SCHEME; ALLEGEDLY HARBORED OR SMUGGLED ALIEN CHILDREN

CHICAGO – A Bolingbrook woman was indicted today on federal charges for allegedly smuggling and/or harboring five illegal aliens, three of whom were children, and defrauding two Illinois state agencies of tens of thousands of dollars in benefits that she was not entitled to receive for child care and adoption subsidies. The defendant, **Esi Antobam**, was charged in a 14-count superseding indictment returned by a federal grand jury, announced Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois. Among the charges, the indictment alleges that as early as January 2001, Antobam sent three adopted children to live in Ghana with someone other than herself and continued to fraudulently collect adoption subsidy payments from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

Antobam, 55, of 355 Pheasant Creek Dr., Bolingbrook, was charged with three counts of mail fraud, four counts of alien harboring, smuggling or attempted smuggling, three counts of misuse of a passport, two counts of identification document fraud, and two counts of making false statements to the former Immigration and Naturalization Service. Antobam was ordered detained in federal custody after she was arrested and charged last October with one count of alien smuggling. She is scheduled to be arraigned on the new charges at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, March 7, before U.S. District Judge Rebecca Pallmeyer.

Mr. Fitzgerald announced the charges with Cynthia O'Connell, Interim District Director, Interior Enforcement, Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, in the U.S. Department of

Homeland Security. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services assisted in the investigation.

According to the indictment, between February 1999 and September 2002, Antobam engaged in a scheme to fraudulently obtain monthly child care benefits from the Illinois Department of Human Services and adoption subsidy payments from DCFS. In the child care fraud scheme, Antobam allegedly falsely represented to DHS that her niece, Individual A, was her child care provider and lived with her at the Bolingbrook residence, when, in fact, Individual A lived in New York and was not a child care provider for Antobam's children. Antobam allegedly forged or caused the forgery of Individual A's signature on the checks DHS mailed to Individual at Antobam's home and deposited the money into her own bank accounts.

In the DCFS portion of fraud scheme, in January 1999, Antobam adopted three children and applied for adoption subsidies, which DCFS approved in the amount of \$3,055 per month. As early as January 2001, Antobam sent her adopted children to live in Ghana and did not notify DCFS of the children's change in residence as required. Unaware of the change, DCFS continued to send subsidy payments to Antobam, which she continued to deposit into her bank accounts, through January 2003.

The alien smuggling charges allege that Antobam obtained numerous U.S. passports in the identities of actual U.S. citizens, which she used to bring illegal aliens into the country. She also allegedly provided numerous false identification documents to illegal aliens living with her to allow them to obtain work here, and she allegedly used them to obtain rent and household services that the illegal aliens provided. The false statement counts allege 1) that in May 2002 Antobam falsely represented that she was the adoptive parent of a minor citizen of Ghana, when, in fact, she knew that she was not and the child's biological and legal parents were in Ghana, and 2) that copies of her

tax returns for 1998-2000 that she provided to the INS were not the returns that she filed with the Internal Revenue Service.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Valarie Hays.

If convicted, each count of mail fraud, alien harboring or smuggling, and making a false statement carries a maximum penalty of 5 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000; while each count of identification document fraud carries a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, and each count of misuse of a passport count carries a maximum of 10 years and a \$250,000 fine. Restitution is mandatory. The Court, however, would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed under the United States Sentencing Guidelines.

The public is reminded that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the United States has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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