



***United States Attorney  
District of New Jersey***

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**TOGOLESE WOMAN SENTENCED TO 27 YEARS IN PRISON FOR FORCED LABOR  
OF YOUNG WEST AFRICAN WOMEN IN HAIR BRAIDING SALONS IN NEWARK  
AND EAST ORANGE, NEW JERSEY**

***Defendant Also Ordered to Pay Victims Over \$3.9 Million in Missed Wages***

NEWARK, N.J. – The ringleader of a human trafficking operation in which dozens of women and girls were brought to the United States and forced to work without pay at hair braiding salons in Newark and East Orange, N.J. was sentenced today to 324 months in prison, United States Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Akouavi Kpade Afolabi, 55, was convicted on October 14, 2009, of all 22 counts of the Indictment which charged her with conspiring with others – including her ex-husband, Lassissi Afolabi, and her son, Dereck Hounakey – to commit forced labor; traffic with respect to forced labor; hold visas and identification; commit visa fraud; and smuggle and harbor illegal aliens.

U.S. Attorney Fishman stated: “Afolabi enriched herself through the forced labor of women and girls, some as young as 10 years old, preying on their desire for a better life and violating their most basic civil rights. This type of behavior is intolerable in a civilized society and, today, Afolabi faces justice in the loss of her own freedom. Going forward, we will continue to work with our law enforcement partners and other agencies in our communities to uncover and root out this modern form of slavery.”

Peter T. Edge, special agent in charge of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Newark stated: “ICE aggressively targets criminals who exploit or victimize vulnerable individuals who are looking for a better life in the United States. We are committed to identifying, dismantling and disrupting the international criminal organizations that are involved in any form of involuntary servitude.”

According to the evidence at trial:

From October 2002 through September 2007, Akouavi Kpade Afolabi engaged in a conspiracy to obtain the forced labor of a number of women and girls she had brought over from Togo with fraudulent visas. Akouavi Kpade Afolabi and another co-conspirator, Geoffry Kouevi, would seek out individuals with a type of visa which would allow the holders to bring spouses or children with them into the country. She would then solicit those individuals to falsely claim non-relatives as family members.

Kouevi taught the recruits to study facts about their fake husbands and fathers in order to pass their interviews at the U.S. Embassy, prepared all of the paperwork necessary for them to obtain their visas, and obtained fraudulent passports for them. Over the course of the conspiracy, Kouevi helped to fraudulently obtain more than 25 visas.

Once the young women and girls entered the United States, Akouavi Kpade Afolabi and her ex-husband required their victims to work at hair braiding salons for up to 14 hours per day, six or seven days a week. The victims were also required to turn over all of their earnings, including their tips, to the defendants. The defendants did not allow the girls and women to keep their passports or identification; to speak with their families outside of the defendants' presence; or to make any outside friends. They were rarely permitted to leave their respective residences, all of which were controlled by the defendants, other than to work. When a victim broke a rule she was punished, often physically, by one of the Afolabis.

In addition to the prison term, Judge Linares sentenced Akouavi Kpade Afolabi to three years supervised release and ordered her to pay restitution in the amount of \$3,949,140.80. The restitution amount includes the wages the victims should have been paid during their servitude, calculated under the Fair Labor Standards Act, which provides for payment of minimum wage and overtime, as well as compensatory damages for the delay in receiving wages.

Lassissi Afolabi, 47, was sentenced to 292 months in prison on July 12, 2010, for conspiring to commit forced labor; traffic with respect to forced labor; hold visas and identification; commit forced labor with aggravated sexual abuse; and travel with intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct with a minor. Hounakey, 33, was sentenced to 55 months in prison on June 28, 2010, for conspiring with the others to commit forced labor, traffic with respect to forced labor, and hold visas and identification. Geoffry Kouevi, 31, who was convicted after a jury trial last July of conspiring with Kpade Afolabi to commit visa fraud, was sentenced to 26 month in prison on August 18, 2010.

U.S. Attorney Fishman credited special agents of ICE HSI in Newark, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Peter T. Edge, as well as agents of the U.S. Department of Labor, Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection, and the U.S. Department of State for the investigation leading to today's sentence.

ICE encourages public involvement by reporting suspected cases of trafficking to its tipline: 1-866-DHS-2-ICE.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Shana W. Chen of the United States Attorney's Office Organized Crime/Gangs Unit, and Nancy Hoppock, Chief of the Office's Criminal Division.

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Defense counsel: Olubukola O. Adetula, Irvington, N.J.