



*United States Attorney  
District of New Jersey*

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**TOGOLESE MAN SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR VISA FRAUD INTENDED  
TO SMUGGLE YOUNG WEST AFRICAN WOMEN INTO NEW JERSEY**

NEWARK, N.J. – A man from Togo was sentenced today for his participation in an operation in which dozens of women and girls from Togo and Ghana were brought into New Jersey with fraudulently obtained visas, United States Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Geoffrey Kouevi, 31, was sentenced to 26 months in prison for the one count of visa fraud and one count of visa fraud conspiracy on which he was convicted following a jury trial last July. United States District Judge Jose L. Linares presided over the trial and imposed the sentence today in Newark federal court.

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

From October 2002 through October 2005, Kouevi conspired with Akouavi Kpade Afolabi to help individuals fraudulently obtain visas to allow them to travel to the United States. As part of the conspiracy, Afolabi 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.

At trial, several witnesses, including young women who were brought by Afolabi into the United States to work at hair braiding salons in Newark and East Orange, testified that Kouevi helped them fraudulently obtain visas. Kouevi taught them 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.

In addition to the prison term, Judge Linares sentenced Kouevi to 3 years of supervised release.

Afolabi, who was convicted after a separate jury trial of conspiracy to commit visa fraud, forced labor, trafficking with respect to forced labor, holding victims' visas and identification and harboring illegal aliens, is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Linares on September 1, 2010.

U.S. Attorney Fishman credited special agents of the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement 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.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Shana W. Chen and Nancy Hoppock of the United States Attorney's Office Criminal Division in Newark.

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Defense counsel: Michael A. Baldassare, Esq., Newark, New Jersey