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TWO FOREIGN NATIONALS ARRESTED FOR SMUGGLING EAST AFRICANS TO THE UNITED STATES

WASHINGTON – Two foreign nationals have been arrested on charges of conspiracy and alien smuggling in connection with their roles in smuggling East Africans to the United States, Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Jeffrey A. Taylor for the District of Columbia, and Assistant Secretary Julie L. Myers of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced today.

Mohammed Kamel Ibrahim, a.k.a. “Hakim,” 26, a native of Ghana and naturalized citizen of Mexico, and Sampson Lovelace Boateng, a.k.a. “Pastor,” 53, are charged in a 28-count indictment returned by a federal grand jury in the District of Columbia on Oct. 31, 2007, and unsealed today. Ibrahim was detained on a provisional arrest warrant this morning by Mexican authorities in Mexico City in response to a U.S. government request for his arrest and extradition. Boateng, Ibrahim’s co-defendant, was arrested at Miami International Airport on Nov. 5, 2007, after arriving on a commercial airline flight from Belize. Boateng had his initial appearance today in U.S. District Court before Magistrate Judge John M. Facciola in Washington, D.C. He is being held without bond.

According to the indictment, Ibrahim operated an alien-smuggling organization based in Mexico City that had been moving aliens, primarily East Africans, to the United States through Mexico since at least 2005. Beginning in June 2006 and continuing through February 2007, Ibrahim worked with Boateng, a Belize-based alien smuggler and document provider, and others to smuggle unauthorized aliens to the United States for commercial advantage and private financial gain.

The indictment alleges that Ibrahim and various co-conspirators recruited East African aliens who wished to be smuggled into the United States in exchange for money. Ibrahim worked through Boateng and others to fraudulently procure various foreign travel documents, such as Mexican visas, that enabled aliens to travel through Africa, South America, and Central America en route to the United States. Using the fraudulently obtained Mexican visas, East African aliens traveled into Mexico City, where they were met by Ibrahim and his associates. After housing the aliens for several days or weeks in Mexico City, Ibrahim and his associates smuggled the aliens into the United States through various means, including by storing the aliens for more than twelve hours at a time in the luggage compartments of buses traveling north to the United States border.

“The Department of Justice is committed to aggressively prosecuting individuals who undermine our national security and seek to profit off of the movement of illegal aliens through our borders,” said Assistant Attorney General Fisher. “These arrests underscore the strong partnerships we have within the law enforcement community both in the United States and abroad.”

“Alien smuggling rings such as this one threaten our national security by thwarting the country's efforts to control lawful immigration and secure our borders,” stated U.S. Attorney Taylor. “Smugglers also prey on desperate persons from around the world and, as happened here, expose those persons to the risk of great physical harm. The charges announced today are an example of the commitment of the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security to combating human smuggling.”

“Criminal smuggling organizations earn millions of dollars through the ruthless exploitation of illegal aliens,” said Julie L. Myers, Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for ICE. “I’m proud of the international cooperation between ICE agents and our law enforcement partners in Mexico and Belize that culminated in these arrests. By attacking these organized criminal networks in a comprehensive way, we are shutting down vulnerabilities in our country and in theirs.”

If convicted, Ibrahim and Boateng face a maximum five years in prison for conspiracy and 10 years in prison for each violation of encouraging and inducing aliens to come to the United States for profit. In addition, the maximum penalty for bringing aliens to the United States for profit is 10 years for a first or second violation, and 15 years for any other violation. They are also subject to fines of \$250,000.

The investigation was conducted by ICE in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. International support and coordination was provided by the ICE Attaché in Mexico City. Valuable assistance was provided by the Diplomatic Security Office of the U.S. Embassy and the DEA Attaché Office in Belize. Mexican and Belizean authorities also provided substantial support.

The case is being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Brian Rogers of the Domestic Security Section of the Department of Justice and Assistant U.S. Attorney Jay Bratt of the District of Columbia. Valuable support was provided by Attorneys Mary Ann Snow and Patricia Petty of the Justice Department’s Office of International Affairs.

An indictment is merely an accusation, and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty at trial beyond a reasonable doubt.

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