



Department of Justice

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IMMOKALEE, FLORIDA, FAMILY CHARGED WITH FORCING IMMIGRANTS INTO FARM LABOR

WASHINGTON - Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division Grace Chung Becker and U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Florida Robert E. O'Neill today announced the indictment of six Immokalee, Fla., family members for enslaving Mexican and Guatemalan immigrants and forcing them into agricultural labor.

According to the 17-count indictment, Cesar Navarrete and Geovanni Navarrete beat, threatened, restrained and locked workers in trucks to force them to work for them as agricultural laborers. The defendants underpaid the workers and imposed escalating debts on them, threatening physical harm if workers left their employment before their debts had been repaid.

Cesar, Geovanni, Jose, Villhina, Ismael and Michael Navarrete and Antonia Zuniga Vargas are also charged with harboring undocumented foreign nationals for private financial gain, commercial advantage, document fraud, and identity theft. Cesar Navarrete is charged with feloniously re-entering the United States after being convicted of a felony and deportation. Jose Navarrete and Ismael Michael Navarrete are charged with re-entering the United States after being deported.

If convicted, Geovanni and Cesar Navarrete each face maximum sentences of over 200 years imprisonment. Antonia Zuniga Vargas and Villhina Navarrete face imprisonment of 40 years, and Jose and Michael Navarrete face imprisonment of 42 years.

An indictment is merely an accusation, and a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

Human trafficking prosecutions such as this one are a top priority of the Department of Justice. In the last seven fiscal years, the Civil Rights Division, in conjunction with the U.S. Attorneys' Offices, has increased by nearly seven-fold the number of human trafficking cases filed in court as compared to the previous seven fiscal years. In FY 2007, the Department obtained a record number of convictions in human trafficking prosecutions.

This case is being investigated by the Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and

Customs Enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Social Security Administration's Office of Inspector General, and the Collier County, Fla., Sheriff's Department. The case is being jointly prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Douglas Molloy and Civil Rights Division Trial Attorney Susan French.

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