

## **Micronesian Couple Pleads Guilty to Withholding Passports for Labor Trafficking**

Article By:

United States Department of Justice (DOJ)

---

Defendants Nesly Mwarecheong, 46, and Bertino Weires, 51, residents of the United States and citizens of the Federated States of Micronesia, pleaded guilty in federal court in Des Moines, Iowa, to two counts of unlawful conduct with respect to documents in furtherance of trafficking or forced labor. A federal grand jury in the Southern District of Iowa had previously returned a five-count indictment against the defendants for recruiting two young men from Micronesia to come to the United States for the purpose of coercing their labor in a meat processing plant for the defendants' financial gain.

According to their plea agreements, the defendants convinced the two victims to leave their homes in Micronesia in December 2019 and travel to the United States by promising them they could work in the United States and send money back to their families. Once in the United States, the defendants confiscated the victims' passports and obtained jobs for them at a meat processing plant in Ottumwa, Iowa. Each week, the defendants took the victims to cash their paychecks before seizing almost the entire amount and leaving the victims with only \$20 each week. The defendants used various means to compel the victims' labor and services, including confiscating the victims' passports and social security cards, imposing debts on them, limiting and monitoring their communication with family, physically and socially isolating them and creating a system of total financial dependence on the defendants. In so doing, the defendants created a situation where the victims either had to continue complying with the defendants' demands or risk being homeless and without a means of supporting themselves in a foreign country where they did not speak the language and had no means of returning home.

"These defendants used the allure of jobs in the United States to entice the victims, and then exploited them and profited off their hard work," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "The Department of Justice remains committed to partnering with federal, state and local officials to investigate and prosecute human trafficking offenses, which have no place in our society."

The defendants are scheduled to be sentenced by U.S. District Chief Judge Stephanie M. Rose on Feb. 15. The defendants face a maximum statutory penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. The sentence will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of any applicable statutory factors and the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which consider a number of variables. As part of the defendants' plea, they have agreed to pay nearly \$70,000 in restitution to

the victims.

Investigator Jeremy Tosh of the Ottumwa Police Department investigated the case. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Virginia Bruner and Ryan Leemkuil for the Southern District of Iowa and Trial Attorney Christina Randall-James of the Civil Rights Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit prosecuted the case.

Information on the Department of Justice's efforts to combat human trafficking can be found at [www.justice.gov/humantrafficking](http://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking). Anyone who has information about human trafficking should report that information to the National Human Trafficking Hotline toll-free at 1-888-373-7888, which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For more information about human trafficking, please visit [www.humantraffickinghotline.org](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org).

Press Release Number: 22-1074

[Click here to read the full press release on the DOJ website.](#)

© 2025 The U.S. Department of Justice

---

National Law Review, Volume XII, Number 279

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/micronesian-couple-pleads-guilty-to-withholding-passports-labor-trafficking>