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Husband Sentenced to 188 Months in Prison for Human Trafficking Convictions Related to Forced Labor of Foreign Nationals

Couple mistreated workers they hired from India to work in their home in Stockton

The Justice Department today announced that former Stockton, California resident Satish Kartan, 46, was sentenced today to 188 months in prison for forced labor violations. In addition, U.S. District Judge Morrison C. England Jr. ordered \$15,657 be paid in restitution to three victims, in part to cover their back wages and other losses.

On March 14, 2019, after an 11-day trial, a federal jury found Kartan and his wife, Sharmistha Barai, 40, guilty of conspiracy to obtain forced labor and two counts of obtaining forced labor. Kartan was also found guilty of one count of fraud in foreign labor contracting. On Oct. 2, Barai was sentenced to 15 years and eight months in prison for forced labor violations.

“The United States abolished slavery and involuntary servitude more than 150 years ago,” said Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband for the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “Yet, inhuman forced labor and deprivations of liberty and dignity persist because human traffickers proliferate modern-day slavery, and endeavor to exploit their fellow human beings for profit and other gruesome purposes. The sentence imposed today sends a stern message that human trafficking and forced labor will not be tolerated in the United States. The defendant’s role in this scheme to compel the victims into servitude for up to 18 hours a day, with minimal pay, through intimidation, threats, and violence, is an unconscionable and illegal criminal violation of the victims’ individual rights, freedom, and dignity. The Civil Rights Division remains committed to pursuing justice relentlessly on behalf of victims of human trafficking and prosecuting perpetrators to the fullest extent of the law.”

“Kartan earned his sentence by the systematic abuse and exploitation of vulnerable women for the benefit of his wife and family,” said U.S. Attorney McGregor W. Scott for the Eastern District of California. “He verbally abused multiple victims, withheld basic sustenance from them, and physically intimidated them. Today’s sentence will send a loud message to others engaged in human trafficking and labor. Moreover, it will give Kartan’s victims the peace of mind that he will never be able to abuse them again.”

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“Those engaged in the heinous crime of forced labor will face severe consequences for their actions,” said Matthew Perlman, Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of the U.S. Department of State’s Diplomatic Security Service (DSS), San Francisco Field Office. “The Diplomatic Security Service and our partner agencies will continue to aggressively pursue and prosecute those who commit visa fraud to exploit others for their own personal gain.”

“Victims of labor trafficking are often unaware of how to get help and that services are available to help them after they are recovered,” said SAC Sean Ragan of the FBI Sacramento Field Office. “The FBI is committed to working with our law enforcement partners and investigating allegations of human trafficking and to break the cycle of force, fraud, or coercion that has bound victims to their traffickers. To be successful, we need your help. Please report alleged human trafficking to law enforcement or submit a tip to tips.fbi.gov.”

“This sentencing is a success in the fight against the heinous crime of human trafficking in our region and our dedication to bring these criminals to justice,” said Tatum King, SAC, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) for San Francisco and Northern California. “We are grateful to our law enforcement partners, especially the Stockton Police Department, Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, the U.S. Attorney’s Office, DSS, and the FBI, for their unwavering efforts not only in this investigation, but in our continued fight to disrupt and dismantle human trafficking networks worldwide. We also are appreciative of the critical work that community-based organizations provide in bringing these heinous violations to light as well as the critical resources they provide to victims to assist in their recovery.”

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, between February 2014 and October 2016, Kartan and Barai hired workers from overseas to perform domestic labor in their home in Stockton. In advertisements seeking workers on the internet and India-based newspapers, the defendants made false claims about the wages and conditions of employment. Once the workers arrived at the defendants’ Stockton residence, Kartan and Barai compelled them to work up to 18 hours a day with limited rest and nourishment. Few of them were paid any wage. As part of the conspiracy, the couple kept the domestic workers from leaving and coerced them to continue working by threatening them, by creating an atmosphere of fear, control, and disempowerment, and at times by physically hitting or burning them. When a victim resisted or expressed a desire to leave, the threats and abuse became worse.

This case was the product of an investigation by HSI, the FBI, and DSS. The Stockton Police Department provided the initial investigation and later assistance with victim services. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jason Hitt and Katherine Lydon prosecuted the case with the assistance of the Civil Rights Division’s Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit.

The Eastern District of California (Sacramento) is one of six districts designated through a competitive, nationwide selection process as a Phase II Anti-Trafficking Coordination Team, through the interagency ACTeam Initiative of the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security and Labor. ACTeams focus on developing high-impact human trafficking investigations and prosecutions involving forced labor, international sex trafficking and sex trafficking by force, fraud or coercion through interagency collaboration among federal prosecutors and federal investigative agencies.

Topic(s):
Civil Rights
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Component(s):
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