



Bronx man pleads guilty to laundering \$1.5 million in fraud proceeds from business email compromises and romance scams targeting elderly for Ghana-based criminal enterprise

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Jonathan D. Larsen, Special Agent in Charge of the New York Field Office of the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation ("IRS-CI"), announced that Alhassan Iddris Lari, a/k/a Hassan Lari, pled guilty today to conspiring to commit money laundering and operating an unlawful money transmitting business, in connection with his involvement from at least in or about 2014 through in or about 2020 with a Ghana-based criminal enterprise that has fraudulently obtained millions of dollars through business email compromises and romance scams that targeted the elderly. The plea was entered in front of U.S. District Judge George B. Daniels. Lari is the seventh defendant to plead guilty in the case.

IRS-CI Special Agent in Charge Jonathan D. Larsen said: "IRS Criminal Investigation uses financial investigative expertise to pursue those individuals who engage in corruption as demonstrated in this case by Mr. Lari. Money laundering and fraud constitutes a serious threat to our communities and to the integrity of our financial system; today's plea is an example of how the FBI and the IRS continue to work together as a formidable team to prosecute these offenders."

According to the Indictment and other filings and statements at public court proceedings in the case:

From at least in or about 2014 through in or about February 2020, Lari was a member of a criminal enterprise (the "Enterprise") based in the Republic of Ghana ("Ghana") that committed a series of business email compromises and romance scams against individuals and businesses located across the United States, including in the Southern District of New York. Lari, while in the Bronx, New York, received or otherwise directed the receipt of at least approximately \$1.5 million in fraud proceeds of the Enterprise in cash from co-conspirators or directly from victims through bank accounts he controlled. Several of these bank accounts were opened using a shell shipping company, in order to avoid detection and hide the fraudulent nature of the transactions. Once

LARI received the fraud proceeds in bank accounts under his control, he withdrew, transported, and laundered those fraud proceeds to other members of the Enterprise, including those located in Ghana.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney Audrey Strauss said: "Alhassan Lari and his co-defendants operated an online criminal enterprise whose profile included romance schemes targeting the elderly. Navigating the anonymous world of the internet, and especially online dating, is oftentimes complicated enough without the added peril of fraudsters lurking to scam would-be daters. This case exemplifies the need to always remain alert and cautious on the internet – especially when being asked for money by a stranger, don't hesitate to swipe left."

Lari also operated an unlicensed money transmitting business located in the Bronx, New York used by co-conspirators of the Enterprise to facilitate and transfer fraud proceeds from the United States to co-conspirators in Ghana.

FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge William F. Sweeney Jr. said: "Manipulating someone's belief in finding love and then stealing their money is not only criminal, but unbelievably cruel. Mr. Lari and his band of thieves targeted the elderly population, using their age as a weapon to break the law. These fraudsters not only used romance to scam people, they employed business email compromise schemes, a fast-growing cyber threat to which everyone should pay close attention. We can hold these people accountable, even in far-away countries, if we have help from the public. If you know someone who has been scammed, or if you believe you may be a victim, contact us at IC3.gov to report it to us."

Lari a citizen of both the United States and Ghana, pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, which carries a maximum sentence of twenty years in prison, and one count of operation of an unlawful money transmitting business, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison. Lari will be sentenced by U.S. District Judge George B. Daniels on June 16, 2021.

The maximum potential sentences are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the judge.

Other defendants in this case who have been sentenced include Muftau Adamu, a/k/a "Muftau Adams," a/k/a "Muftau Iddrissu," of the Bronx, New York, who was sentenced to 51 months in prison on June 7, 2019; Prince Nana Aggrey of the Bronx, New York, who was sentenced to 30 months in prison on May 10, 2019; and Assana Traore of the Bronx, New York, who was sentenced to 15 months in prison on October 8, 2019. Adamu and Aggrey each pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, and Traore pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to receive stolen money. Each of the defendants was sentenced by United States District Judge Denise L. Cote.

The investigation was conducted by the IRS – Criminal Investigation and the FBI with assistance from U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the FBI Legal Attaché in Accra, Ghana.

The prosecution of this case is being handled by the Office's Complex Frauds and Cybercrime Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys Sagar K. Ravi and Mitzi S. Steiner are in charge of the prosecution.

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