

Please take the time to give us your feedback.

[Take Survey](#)

[No thanks](#)



UNODC
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



Case Law Database



Trafficking in persons

United States v. Lee



[United States of America](#)



Fact Summary

The Civil Rights Division led a long and difficult investigation resulting in a 22-count indictment against five defendants charged with subjecting workers to involuntary servitude in a garment factory in American Samoa. Specifically, the indictment charged that the defendants brought 250 Vietnamese, and Chinese nationals, mostly young women, to work as sewing machine operators in a Daewoosa garment factory. The victims, some of whom were held for up to two years, were forced to work through extreme food deprivation, beatings, and physical restraint. The victims were held in barracks on a guarded company compound, and were threatened with confiscation of their passports, deportation, economic bankruptcy, severe economic hardship to family members, false arrest, and a host of other consequences. One victim had an eye gouged out by a defendant who struck her with a jagged pipe in order to punish her for refusing to comply with the defendants' orders.



Commentary and Significant Features

United States v. Kil Soo Lee is the largest trafficking prosecution ever brought by the Department of Justice.

Author:

UNODC



Keywords

Trafficking in Persons Protocol:

Article 3, Trafficking in Persons Protocol

Article 5, Trafficking in Persons Protocol

Acts:

Recruitment

Transportation

Harbouring

Means:

Threat or use of force or other forms of coercion

Abduction

Abuse of power or a position of vulnerability

Purpose of Exploitation:

Forced labour or services

Slavery or practices similar to slavery

Servitude

Form of Trafficking:

Sector in which exploitation takes place:

Factory/Manufacturing



Procedural Information

Legal System:

Common Law

Latest Court Ruling:

Court of 1st Instance

Type of Proceeding:

Criminal

On March 23, 2001, the defendant was arrested on a federal warrant issued by the US District Court for the District of Hawaii. The Complaint and Affidavit in support of the warrant alleged that the defendant violated 18 U.S.C. 1584 (involuntary servitude), and 18 U.S.C.1589 (forced labor). On August 30, 2001, a federal grant jury returned a 22 count indictment.

The defendant was charged with 1 count of conspiracy to violate the civil rights of workers (18 U.S.C. 241), 17 counts of involuntary servitude (18 U.S.C.1584), 1 count of extortion (18 U.S.C. 1951), 1 count of money laundering (18 U.S.C. 1956), 1 count of making a false statement to a financial institution (18 U.S.C. 1014), and 1 count of bribery (18 U.S.C. 215).

During the trial, 36 witnesses testified for the government, including 21 abused workers. The government dismissed 2 of the involuntary servitude charges, and the false statement to a bank official charge.



Victims / Plaintiffs in the first instance

**Victim:** 1-250 Anonymous**Gender:** Male**Nationality:** Chinese / Samoan / Vietnamese

mostly women



Defendants / Respondents in the first instance

**Defendant:** Kil Soo Lee**Gender:** Male**Legal Reasoning:**

HOLDING:

Two Samoan defendants who conspired with [Lee] pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy. On February 21, 2002, the lead defendant [Kil Soo Lee] was convicted of one count of conspiracy to violate the civil rights of the worker victims, eleven counts of involuntary servitude, one count of extortion, and one count of money laundering. On June 22, 2005, [Lee] was sentenced to 40 years of incarceration.

Defendant: Anonymous 2**Nationality:** Samoan**Defendant:** Anonymous 3**Nationality:** Samoan



Charges / Claims / Decisions



Defendant: Kil Soo Lee

Legislation / Statute / Code:

Title 18 United States Code Section 241

Charge details:

Conspiracy to violate the civil rights of workers (1 count)

Verdict: Guilty

Charge details:

Involuntary servitude (15 counts)

Verdict: Guilty

Charge details:

Extortion (1 count)

Verdict: Guilty

Charge details:

Money laundering (1 count)

Verdict: Guilty

Charge details:

Making a false statement to a financial institution (1 count)

Verdict: Not Guilty

Charge details:

Bribery (1 count)

Verdict: Guilty

Term of Imprisonment:

40 years

Appellate Decision:

Upheld

Defendant: Anonymous 2

Charge details:

Conspiracy to violate the civil rights of workers (1 count)

Verdict: Guilty

Defendant: Anonymous 3

Charge details:

Conspiracy to violate the civil rights of workers (1 count)

Verdict: Guilty



Court

United States District Court for the District of Hawaii



Sources / Citations

U.S. Department of Justice: "Report on Activities to Combat Human Trafficking" Fiscal Years 2001-2005, Appendix Human Trafficking cases p.75:

http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/crim/trafficking_report_2006.pdf



[HOME](#)
[DISCLAIMER](#)
[LEGAL NOTICE](#)
[CONTACTS](#)

[To Top](#)