

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024036981617 TULSA, Okla. – A Norman man pleaded guilty Tuesday in U.S. District Court for his role as a money launderer in a Nigerian romance scam that defrauded multiple victims, including elder Americans, of millions, announced U.S. Attorney Trent Shores. Afeez Olajide Adebara, 35, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit money laundering before U.S. District Court Judge Gregory K. Frizzell. Adebara's sentencing hearing is set for Feb. 3, 2021. "Adebara organized and led a money laundering operation from Oklahoma in order to conceal the proceeds of a Nigerian Romance Scam. He and his co-conspirators defrauded an Oklahoman and two other victims of more than \$1.5 million," said U.S. Attorney Trent Shores. "Romance scams inflict the highest reported financial losses yearly, totaling about \$200 million in 2019, when compared to other online scams. Con artists like Adebara have no shame. They care not if their victims are elders, veterans, or hard working Americans living paycheck to paycheck. I commend the FBI agents and federal prosecutors who took down this international money laundering operation." In his plea agreement, Adebara admitted that he knew the money involved in the financial transactions involved the proceeds from unlawful activity. He further stated that he knew the financial transactions were designed, in whole or in part, to conceal or disguise the nature, the location, the source, the ownership, or the control of the proceeds of the unlawful activity. From 2017 through and November 2019, Adebara knowingly concealed the proceeds of a romance scam operation by moving money between and among multiple bank accounts that were opened under various aliases using fake passports and other fraudulent identification documents to obscure the source of the funds and the identities of the co-conspirators. Court documents state that he and his co-conspirators took further steps to conceal the source of the funds, took a commission, and directed the remainder of the funds back to the online romance scammers in Nigeria, including in the form of vehicles and vehicle parts. According to court documents, Adebara coordinated with overseas co-conspirators who had assumed false identities on online dating websites and social media platforms with the intent to defraud victims. Adebara opened multiple accounts using fraudulent identities then provided the account and routing numbers to the overseas co-conspirators. The overseas co-conspirators told victims they were U.S. residents working abroad. In fact, the investigation revealed that these overseas co-conspirators were located in Nigeria. As these online "relationships" continued, the overseas co-conspirators' would request increasingly larger sums of money, claiming that the funds were needed to complete business projects or to return to the United States. The victims were directed by the overseas co-conspirators to send funds to Adebara and others' bank accounts, assuring the victims that he would allocate the money as needed. Adebara was charged on Nov. 13, 2019, along with nine co-defendants. John Oluwaseun Ogundele, 31, formerly of Norman, pleaded guilty on June 15, 2020. The remaining defendants are Joshua Naandom Ditep, 25, Nigerian citizen and lawful permanent resident of the United States residing in Norman; Paul Usoro, 26, Nigerian citizen and lawful permanent resident of the United States residing in Norman; Chibuzo Godwin Obiefuna, Jr., 27, U.S. citizen residing in Long Beach, California; Tobiloba Kehinde, 28, Nigerian citizen residing in Norman; Jamiu Ibukun Adedeji, 24, Nigerian citizen, residing in Norman; First and last name unknown #1, who maintained an address in Brooklyn, New York; First and last name unknown #2, who maintained an address in Dallas, Texas; and First and last name unknown #3, who maintained an address in Dallas, Texas. Ditep, Usoro, Obiefuna, Kehinde, and Adedeji await trial while the three additional co-defendants remain fugitives. These remaining defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law. The FBI's Oklahoma City Field Office conducted the investigation. Trial Attorney Babasijibomi Moore of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher Nassar of the Northern District of Oklahoma are prosecuting the case. This case is part of an ongoing national effort by the Department of Justice to address online fraud schemes often based out of Nigeria that target U.S. citizens. The public is encouraged to report potential online fraud activity or scams to the FBI.