

Obstruction Is Charged in Sex Slavery Case

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Body

In November, a federal immigration agent flashed his badge at the door of a Queens apartment and told a frightened young woman from South Korea that he was there to deport her.

The woman had been cooperating with the police against the owners of a Flushing bar that she said had held her captive in a case of human trafficking, federal prosecutors in Brooklyn said yesterday. The woman said they beat her and tried to coerce her to become a prostitute to pay back an ever-growing debt.

The immigration agent, Nisim Yushuvayev, was legitimate. But his threats were not, the prosecutors said in an obstruction-of-justice complaint they filed against him yesterday. They said he was in league with the bar owners to spirit the woman out of the country to keep her from providing prosecutors with more information against him.

The story of the agent and the young South Korean woman provided a glimpse of the shadowy world of forced labor and what the prosecutors described as sex slavery in New York City. The prosecutors said the bar owners, Wun and Kyongja Kang, used promises of a better life in the United States to entice two young women from Seoul to work at the bar, the Renaissance Bar & Room Cafe in Flushing.

Before one of the women slipped away and went to the police, the prosecutors said, the gentle promises made in Seoul ended with violence, sexual assaults and efforts to sell the women to a Chinatown brothel. The Kangs were arrested last month. They face federal forced labor charges and have been held without bail. They have pleaded not guilty.

Until the Renaissance bar closed last month, neighbors said, men arrived each night. Inside, more than a dozen young South Korean women were hostesses. "It's just a place where they get the guys to open their wallets," said a neighbor who refused to give his name yesterday.

Across the country, prosecutors say, an unknown number of women, and some boys and men, are trapped each year in a desperate life of forced labor that sometimes involves sexual servitude. Often, they say, the victims are brought to this country by people who play on their hopes and then strand them here with big debts they cannot repay.

Yesterday the United States attorney in Brooklyn, Roslynn R. Mauskopf, called such traffickers "21st-century slave traders."

In the city, such stories come to light rarely, often in sketchy accounts from victims who can be as frightened of officials as they are of their captors. In another case last month, Brooklyn prosecutors charged four Mexican men living in Corona, Queens, with smuggling four women into this country to work at brothels in Brooklyn and Queens.

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Yesterday, the prosecutors said Kyongja Kang, 41, found the young women in South Korea on a trip there. They said she promised them respectable work keeping customers company and pouring them drinks.

She told them, according to the complaint, that no sexual relations would be involved. Once here, though, the complaint said the agreed-upon \$10,000 debt the women owed the bar owners for travel costs and rent mushroomed. The young women were never paid. Their passports were held by the bar owners, the complaint said.

Soon, the prosecutors said, there were suggestions from people at the bar and Mr. Kang that it would be possible to work off the debt faster by selling themselves for sex. When they resisted the suggestions and tried to slip away, the prosecutors said, Mr. Kang sexually assaulted them and beat one of them.

His lawyer, Charles A. Ross, said yesterday that his client was fighting the charges vigorously.

In federal court in Brooklyn yesterday, an exhausted-looking Mr. Yushuvayev, 27, listened quietly as a federal prosecutor, Lee J. Freedman, told a federal magistrate that Mr. Yushuvayev had confessed after he was arrested on Friday. He said he acknowledged that he had gone to the Queens apartment and tried to take the young woman to Kennedy Airport in a livery cab. She ran away.

But Oliver A. Smith, a lawyer for Mr. Yushuvayev, an inspector for the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, said he planned to contest all of the charges.

Magistrate Judge Roanne L. Mann agreed to release Mr. Yushuvayev on \$500,000 bond, but only after the court received proof of the value of homes pledged as security by his father, an immigrant from Uzbekistan.

It was not clear from the court filings how Mr. Yushuvayev and the Kangs might have known each other. But the complaint said that after he was arrested last month, Mr. Kang admitted that he "sent a man whom he believed to be an I.N.S. employee" to the Queens apartment to get one of the South Korean woman to leave the country "so that she could not testify against him."

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Graphic

Photo: The Renaissance Bar & Room Cafe, on 154th Street in Flushing, Queens, closed last month. An immigration agent and the bar's owners face charges in what prosecutors say involved human trafficking and prostitution. (Photo by Shannon Stapleton for The New York Times)

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