

# Ghanaian Citizen Extradited in Connection with Prosecution of Africa-Based Cybercrime and Business Email Compromise Conspiracy

[justice.gov/opa/pr/ghanaian-citizen-extradited-connection-prosecution-africa-based-cybercrime-and-business-email](https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/ghanaian-citizen-extradited-connection-prosecution-africa-based-cybercrime-and-business-email)



Press Release

Wednesday, August 26, 2020

## For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

A Ghanaian citizen residing in Tamale, Ghana, has been extradited to stand trial for an indictment charging him with wire fraud, money laundering, computer fraud and aggravated identity theft.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Brian C. Rabbitt of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney D. Michael Dunavant of the Western District of Tennessee, and Special Agent in Charge Douglas Korneski of the FBI's Memphis Field Office made the announcement.

On Aug. 23, 2017, a federal grand jury in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee indicted Maxwell Peter, 27, whose given name is Maxwell Atugba Abayeta, and others with conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, conspiracy to commit money laundering, conspiracy to commit computer fraud and aggravated identity theft. Following his extradition, Peter's initial appearance was made Tuesday before U.S. Magistrate Judge Charmiane G. Claxton for the Western District of Tennessee.

The indictment alleges that various Africa-based co-conspirators committed, or caused to be committed, a series of intrusions into the servers and email systems of a Memphis-based real estate company in June and July 2016. Using sophisticated anonymization techniques, including the use of spoofed email addresses and Virtual Private Networks, the co-conspirators identified large financial transactions, initiated fraudulent email correspondence with relevant business parties and then redirected closing funds through a network of U.S.-

based money mules to final destinations in Africa. Commonly referred to as business-email compromise, or BEC, this aspect of the scheme caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in losses to companies and individuals in Memphis. The defendant is specifically alleged to have directed the transfer of funds from a June 2016 BEC to a co-conspirator in Africa.

In addition to BEC, the defendant is also charged with perpetrating romance scams, fraudulent-check scams, gold-buying scams, advance-fee scams and credit card scams. The indictment alleges that the proceeds of these criminal activities, both money and goods, were shipped and/or transferred from the United States to locations in Africa through a complex network of both complicit and unwitting individuals that had been recruited through the various Internet scams. The defendant is specifically alleged to have created and used the alias "Sandra Lin" in furtherance of these crimes. From May through June of 2017, Peter is alleged to have communicated with an FBI agent acting in an undercover capacity to receive the proceeds of fraud. Along with his coconspirators over the life of the conspiracy, the defendant is believed to have caused millions of dollars in losses to victims across the globe.

An indictment is merely an allegation and the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Seven other individuals have pleaded guilty to being involved in these schemes. Benard E. Okorhi, 41, was extradited in March 2020 from Canada, and is detained pending trial. Two others, Olufalajimi Abegunde, 33, and Javier Luis Ramos-Alonso, 30, were convicted in March after a seven-day trial in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee. Abegunde received a 78-month sentence and Ramos-Alonso received a 31-month sentence for their roles in the scheme. Several individuals remain at large.

The FBI led the investigation. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs, as well as the FBI's Legal Attaché in Accra, the FBI Transnational Organized Crime of the Eastern Hemisphere Section of the Criminal Investigative Division, the FBI's Major Cyber Crimes Unit of the Cyber Division, FBI's Money Laundering, Forfeiture, and Bank Fraud Unit of the Criminal Investigative Division, and FBI's International Organized Crime Intelligence and Operations Center all provided significant support in this case, as did the U.S. Marshals Service, INTERPOL Washington, the INTERPOL Unit of the Ghana Police Service, the Republic of Ghana's Office of the Attorney-General & Ministry of Justice, and Ghana's Economic and Organised Crime Office.

Senior Trial Attorney Timothy C. Flowers of the Criminal Division's Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Debra L. Ireland of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Tennessee are prosecuting the case.

For more information or to view a list of aliases used by members of the conspiracy on dating websites and social media, visit <https://www.justice.gov/usao-wdtn/victim-witness-program>.

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## **Topics**

Cybercrime

Financial Fraud

Identity Theft

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