

# Foreign National Sentenced for Victimizing U.S. Persons Through Cyber-Enabled Fraud Schemes

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Press Release

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**For Immediate Release**

Office of Public Affairs

A Nigerian national was sentenced today to four years and one month in prison for his role in a cybercriminal group operating out of Nigeria and Malaysia, among other places, that executed complex financial fraud scams using the internet.

According to court documents, between December 2011 and January 2017, Solomon Ekunke Okpe, 31, of Lagos, and his co-conspirators devised and executed business email compromise (BEC), work-from-home, check-cashing, romance, and credit card scams that targeted unsuspecting individuals, banks, and businesses in the United States and elsewhere, and were intended to cause more than a million dollars in losses to U.S. victims. Among the victims of the scheme were First American Holding Company and MidFirst Bank.

To execute the scheme, Okpe and his co-conspirators launched email phishing attacks to steal victim login credentials and other sensitive information, hacked into victim online accounts, impersonated people, and assumed fake identities to defraud individuals, banks, and businesses, and trafficked, possessed, and used stolen credit cards in furtherance of the scheme. For instance, in BEC scams, Okpe and his co-conspirators posed as trusted individuals in order to deceive banks and companies into making unauthorized wire transfers to bank accounts specified by the co-conspirators. The co-conspirators also falsely posed as online employers on job websites and forums and purported to “hire” individuals in Arizona and elsewhere to positions that were marketed as legitimate. In reality, these work-from-home “employees” were often

unwittingly directed to perform tasks that would facilitate the co-conspirators' fraud schemes. Some of these tasks included creating bank and payment processing accounts, transferring/withdrawing money from these accounts, or cashing/depositing counterfeit checks.

Okpe and his co-conspirators additionally conducted romance scams by creating accounts on dating websites, feigning interest in romantic relationships with individuals under fictitious identities, and causing these victims to transfer their moneys overseas and/or receive money from wire-transfer scams. Okpe caused and intended to cause individual romance scam victims to suffer tens of thousands of dollars of losses.

Okpe was previously arrested in Malaysia at the request of the United States and detained for over two years as he contested extradition to the United States.

On March 20, one of Okpe's co-conspirators, Johnson Uke Obogo, was sentenced to one year and one day in prison in connection with his role in related financial fraud activity.

Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite, Jr. of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Gary M. Restaino for the District of Arizona, and Special Agent in Charge Joseph E. Carrico of the FBI Knoxville Field Office made the announcement.

Senior Counsel Aarash Haghighat of the Criminal Division's Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section (CCIPS) and Assistant U.S. Attorney Seth Goertz for the District of Arizona prosecuted the cases against Okpe and Obogo. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs provided significant assistance throughout the investigation and extradition process.

A number of victims have been identified by the FBI. However, there is evidence of many more victims that remain unidentified. Anyone who believes they were defrauded by the defendants in this case should contact the Victim Witness Section at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona at [usaaz.victimassist@usdoj.gov](mailto:usaaz.victimassist@usdoj.gov).

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## Topics

Cybercrime

Financial Fraud

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