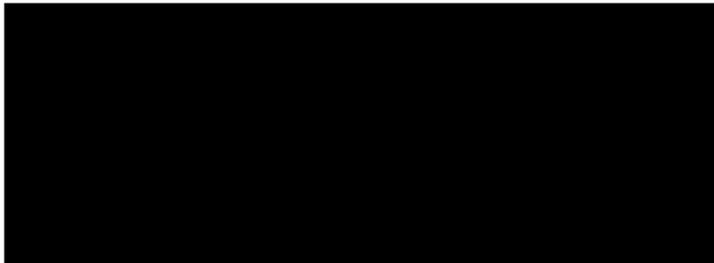


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U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Administrative Appeals Office (AAO)
20 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., MS 2090
Washington, DC 20529-2090



U.S. Citizenship
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Services



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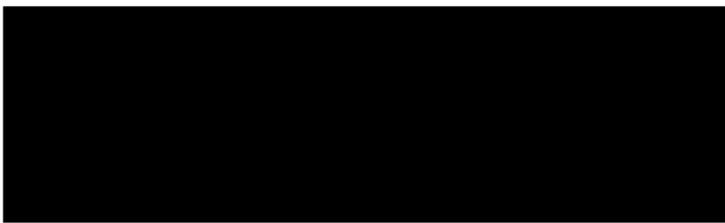


IN RE: Applicant:



APPLICATION: Application for T Nonimmigrant Status under section 101(a)(15)(T)(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(T)(i).

ON BEHALF OF APPLICANT:



INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All of the documents related to this matter have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Please be advised that any further inquiry that you might have concerning your case must be made to that office.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied by us in reaching our decision, or you have additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen. The specific requirements for filing such a request can be found at 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. All motions must be submitted to the office that originally decided your case by filing a Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion with the \$630 fee. Please be aware that 8 C.F.R. § 103.5(a)(1)(i) requires that any motion must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider or reopen.

Thank you,

Perry Rhew
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The Director, Vermont Service Center, (“the director”) denied the application for T nonimmigrant status and the matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The decision of the director will be withdrawn in part and affirmed in part. The appeal will be dismissed.

The applicant seeks nonimmigrant classification under section 101(a)(15)(T)(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (“the Act”), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(T)(i), as a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons. The director denied the application for failure to establish that the applicant was a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons and was physically present in the United States on account of such trafficking.

On appeal, counsel submits a brief and additional evidence. The AAO reviews these proceedings *de novo*. See *Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004). Although the applicant has established that he was a victim of trafficking, he has not demonstrated that he is physically present in the United States on account of such trafficking.

Applicable Law

Section 101(a)(15)(T) of the Act provides, in pertinent part, that an applicant may be classified as a T-1 nonimmigrant if he or she is:

- (i) [S]ubject to section 214(o), an alien who the Secretary of Homeland Security, or in the case of subclause (III)(aa) the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Attorney General, determines –
 - (I) is or has been a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons, as defined in section 103 of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000,
 - (II) is physically present in the United States . . . on account of such trafficking, including physical presence on account of the alien having been allowed entry into the United States for participation in investigative or judicial processes associated with an act or a perpetrator of trafficking;
 - (III) (aa) has complied with any reasonable request for assistance in the Federal, State, or local investigation or prosecution of acts of trafficking or the investigation of crime where acts of trafficking are at least one central reason for the commission of that crime . . . ; and
 - (IV) the alien would suffer extreme hardship involving unusual and severe harm upon removal [.]

Section 103(8) of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), codified at 22 U.S.C. § 7102(8) and incorporated into the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.11(a), defines the term “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as:

- A. sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or
- B. the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

To establish physical presence in the United States on account of trafficking, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.11(g) specifies:

Physical presence on account of trafficking in persons. The applicant must establish that he or she is physically present in the United States . . . on account of such trafficking, and that he or she is a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons that forms the basis for the application. Specifically, the physical presence requirement reaches an alien who: is present because he or she is being subjected to a severe form of trafficking in persons; was recently liberated from a severe form of trafficking in persons; or was subject to severe forms of trafficking in persons at some point in the past and whose continuing presence in the United States is directly related to the original trafficking in persons.

* * *

(2) *Opportunity to depart.* If the alien has escaped the traffickers before law enforcement became involved in the matter, he or she must show that he or she did not have a clear chance to leave the United States in the interim. The Service will consider whether an applicant had a clear chance to leave in light of the individual applicant's circumstances. Information relevant to this determination may include, but is not limited to, circumstances attributable to the trafficking in persons situation, such as trauma, injury, lack of resources, or travel documents that have been seized by the traffickers. This determination may reach both those who entered the United States lawfully and those who entered without being admitted or paroled. The Service will consider all evidence presented to determine the physical presence requirement, including asking the alien . . . about when he or she escaped from the trafficker, what activities he or she has undertaken since that time, including the steps he or she may have taken to deal with the consequences of having been trafficked, and the applicant's ability to leave the United States.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.11(l) prescribes, in pertinent part, the standard of review and the applicant's burden of proof:

- (1) *De novo review.* The Service shall conduct a de novo review of all evidence submitted and is not bound by its previous factual determinations as to any essential elements of the T nonimmigrant status application. . . . The Service will determine, in its sole discretion, the evidentiary value of previously or concurrently submitted evidence.

- (2) *Burden of proof.* At all stages of the processing of an application for any benefits under T nonimmigrant status, the burden shall be on the applicant to present to the Service evidence that fully establishes eligibility for the desired benefit.

Pertinent Facts

The applicant is a native and citizen of India. In his August 13, 2009 statement, the applicant provided the following account of his journey to the United States. In May 2006, while working as a [REDACTED], the applicant went to a seminar given by [REDACTED] in response to an advertisement for work on shipyards in the United States. At the seminar, [REDACTED] told the attendees that they would work for [REDACTED] and the cost would be approximately [REDACTED] to obtain a "green card," payable in three installments. In addition, they would have to pay approximately [REDACTED] to obtain an initial H-2B visa to work for Signal while their "green card" cases were processing. After passing a practical test administered by Signal officials, the applicant made an initial payment of approximately \$540 in late May 2006. In June 2006, the applicant paid approximately \$150 and signed an agreement regarding his remaining payments. On another occasion, the applicant received a document signed by [REDACTED] stating that the applicant had passed the test, would work in [REDACTED] and that the company would obtain his visa. In early August 2006, the applicant paid approximately [REDACTED] to an attorney working for Signal to obtain his visa. In late August 2006, the applicant paid another [REDACTED] to the Signal attorney.

On or about October 2, 2006, the applicant went to a meeting at [REDACTED] to prepare for his visa interview. The Signal attorney told the applicant and about 30 other workers that during their visa interviews they should not say that they had been offered a "green card," but should say they would come back by the end of July; that they did not expect an extension of their visas; and that they had not paid any service fees for the visa. The applicant was interviewed on or about October 4, 2006, but the consular officer told him that they were not granting visas for Signal at that time. After the interview, a [REDACTED] employee took the applicant's passport and told him he would have to pay more fees to get his passport back or to obtain a second consular interview. The applicant obtained his visa at his second interview on February 13, 2007, but [REDACTED] told him he could not get his passport until he paid approximately [REDACTED]. On March 19, 2007, the applicant flew to Mumbai, but when he was unable to pay the full amount, [REDACTED] threatened that he could sell the applicant's passport. The applicant gave [REDACTED] all the money he had and eventually received his passport and airline ticket.

By this time, the applicant had heard from friends in the United States that there were problems with Signal in Mississippi, that the living conditions were very poor and that the company was going to send many workers back to India. When the applicant asked [REDACTED] about the problems, [REDACTED] told him the issues had been resolved, but that he should not go to Signal and should not contact any Signal workers. [REDACTED] told the applicant that he could go to the United States with his Signal visa, but work for other employers. The applicant was worried that he had no money to work elsewhere and initially did not want to go to the United States, but later decided to go because he had already paid so much money, had resigned from his former job, and his brother, who had previously worked in the United States, said he should try. Before he left, [REDACTED] forced the applicant to sign a document stating that he had not paid any money to absolve [REDACTED] of any responsibility.

The applicant arrived in the United States with his brother on March 21, 2007. He recounted that he stayed with friends in Houston for a month and obtained a social security card. The applicant then travelled to New Orleans, Texas and Florida, where he obtained a temporary state identification card. In May 2007, the applicant began working after obtaining a temporary state identification card in Oklahoma. In June 2007, the applicant got an identification card in Chicago and then worked in Louisiana. After paying [REDACTED] to the lawyer who obtained his H-2B visa to work for Signal, the applicant received two extensions of his visa to work for another company, [REDACTED]. The applicant began working for [REDACTED] in October 2007, but eventually stopped due to the dangerous working conditions.

The applicant stated that he reported himself as a trafficking victim to the U.S. Department of Justice on or about March 6, 2008; that he is a potential witness in an investigation of Signal by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC); and that he is a class member in a civil suit against Signal and its associates filed on March 7, 2008. The applicant explained that if he returned to India, he would face reprisal from [REDACTED] and his associates for his involvement in the lawsuit; the police would not protect him; it would be very difficult for him to work in India and repay the debts he incurred to pay his recruiting fees to come to the United States; and he would face disappointment from his community for returning from the United States empty-handed.

Victim of a Severe Form of Trafficking in Persons

The director determined that the applicant was not a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons because although he was subjected to fraudulent visa practices by [REDACTED] and his associates, the purpose of their recruitment was not to subject the applicant to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery, but only for their own personal, monetary gain. The director determined the applicant had not established that Signal was “involved with the initial visa fraud or that it was ever the intention of Signal International to recruit workers for the purpose of subjecting them to forced labor.”

This portion of the director’s decision shall be withdrawn. The evidence submitted below and on appeal establishes that at the time of the applicant’s recruitment, [REDACTED] was acting as Signal’s agent. Under basic principles of agency law, an employer may be held accountable for the actions of its agent. *See generally, 27 Am. Jur. 2d Employment Relationship § 373 (2011)* (discussing an employer’s vicarious liability for its agent’s torts under the doctrine of respondeat superior). The record contains a copy of a notarized document dated August 3, 2006, in which Signal formally granted full power of attorney to [REDACTED] to act as its agent. A June 19, 2006 letter from [REDACTED] also confirmed that Signal had formally appointed [REDACTED] as its “representative in [REDACTED] to facilitate the recruitment of skilled workers to the United States of America for employment under the temporary and permanent resident program.” Although the power of attorney expired on November 6, 2006, the record also contains electronic mail messages dated December 1, 2006 in which Signal invited [REDACTED] to visit the company in the United States and also stated that it was in the process of drafting an agreement for [REDACTED] “continued services in processing etc. the balance of the 590 personnel that Signal has approved under the H2B program” and [REDACTED] agreed to “continue [its] support & cooperation in

this H2B program.” The record thus clearly shows that [REDACTED] was acting as Signal’s agent at the time of its fraudulent recruitment of the applicant beginning in May 2006.

The record also contains evidence that at the time of the applicant’s recruitment, Signal had harbored other Indian workers in labor camps through coercion for the purpose of subjecting them to involuntary servitude. The evidence further shows that Signal was aware of [REDACTED]’s exorbitant recruitment fees and false promises of permanent residency in the United States. In an electronic mail message dated November 17, 2006, a Signal official stated that he had spoken to workers at the labor camp who paid [REDACTED] and that another worker called him from [REDACTED] asking if he could go to Signal directly without paying the [REDACTED] recruitment fee, but the Signal official told him he could not. In a January 15, 2007 electronic mail message, the same Signal official informed other Signal executives that workers had “paid \$12k - \$15k apiece and were promised green cards and permanent settlement in [the] U.S. for themselves and their families” Despite the company’s knowledge of [REDACTED] admitted that Signal nonetheless continued to retain [REDACTED] as an agent to bring in more workers. See Deposition of Ronald Schnoor, David v. Signal, No. 08-1220, (E.D. La. Dec. 16, 2009).

In sum, the preponderance of the evidence demonstrates that the applicant was recruited for his labor by Signal, through its agent [REDACTED] fraudulent promise of permanent residency in the United States and for the purpose of the applicant’s subjection to involuntary servitude. Accordingly, the applicant has established on appeal that he was a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons, as required by section 101(a)(15)(T)(i)(I) of the Act and defined in the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.11(a). Accordingly, the director’s determination to the contrary will be withdrawn.

Physical Presence in the United States on Account of Trafficking

The applicant has not, however, established that he is physically present in the United States on account of the trafficking. The record shows that in March 2007, [REDACTED] told the applicant not to go to Signal and not to contact any Signal workers, but that he could go to the United States and seek work with other employers. The record also contains a February 23, 2007 electronic mail message from Signal’s personnel manager to [REDACTED] explicitly stating that Signal “will not accept any more workers.” The applicant indicated that he had no contact with Signal after his arrival in the United States.

The record does not show that in the United States, Signal ever harbored or obtained the applicant for his labor through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjecting him to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery. Rather, the relevant evidence shows that the trafficking of the applicant ceased after his recruitment in India between May 2006 and March 2007 when he was clearly informed that Signal would not employ him in the United States. The applicant explained that he nonetheless decided to come to the United States to find other work and earn money to repay his loans and support his family. Accordingly, the record indicates that the applicant came to the United States voluntarily, worked for other employers and was not subjected to any other trafficking after his arrival. Because the trafficking ended before his arrival in the United

States, the applicant has not demonstrated that he is physically present in the United States on account of such trafficking, as required by section 101(a)(15)(T)(i)(II) of the Act.

Clear Chance to Depart

Even if the applicant had been trafficked into the United States, he would still fail to meet the physical presence requirement because the relevant evidence indicates that he had a clear chance to depart the United States before any law enforcement agency became involved in the matter. The record shows that the applicant's trafficking ceased in March 2007 after he was told that Signal would not employ him and he travelled to the United States voluntarily on March 21, 2007. The applicant did not contact any law enforcement agency about the trafficking until a year later in March 2008. During that year, the applicant travelled to several states and worked for other employers. The record indicates that during this time, the applicant possessed his passport and was not suffering from trauma or injury. Although the applicant later became involved in a lawsuit against his traffickers, his participation occurred a year after his trafficking ceased. In sum, the record shows that the applicant escaped his traffickers before law enforcement became involved and the applicant has failed to demonstrate that he did not have a clear chance to leave the United States in the interim under the standard and factors explicated in the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.11(g)(2). For this additional reason, the applicant has not established that he is physically present in the United States on account of trafficking, as required by section 101(a)(15)(T)(i)(II) of the Act.

Conclusion

As in all visa classification proceedings, the applicant bears the burden of proof to establish his eligibility for T nonimmigrant status. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361; 8 C.F.R. § 214.11(i)(2). On appeal, the applicant has established that he was a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons in the past, but he has failed to demonstrate that he is physically present in the United States on account of such trafficking, as required by section 101(a)(15)(T)(i)(II) of the Act. Consequently, the appeal will be dismissed.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.