



# Press Release

September 7, 2006

## **USCIS HELPS BUST MARRIAGE FRAUD CASE**

*Agency Participation Culminates in DC-area Arrests*

WASHINGTON – The first of 22 individuals involved in a marriage and immigration fraud scheme were arrested today as part of a three-year law enforcement task force operation in the National Capitol area. As described in the government’s affidavit, the defendants are alleged to have arranged marriages between aliens seeking immigration benefits and United States citizens willing to enter into sham marriages in exchange for money.

“This is an important example of the effective cooperation among Department of Homeland Security (DHS) entities and federal, state and local law enforcement partners to maintain the integrity of our national immigration system,” said USCIS Director Emilio Gonzalez. “Because they are the first to review the suspect cases, USCIS immigration officers serve on the front lines of our Nation’s security and are actively involved in the detection of fraud and abuse.”

Today’s arrests were a result of the efforts of a task force of federal and local law enforcement agencies including: USCIS, ICE, the Arlington County (Va.) Police Department, the Fairfax County (Va.) Police Department, the Internal Revenue Service and the Departments of State and Commerce. Aliens who participated in this fraud scheme were primarily from Ghana and generally paid large fees, between \$2,500 and \$6,000, to the defendants who facilitated the sham marriages.

When USCIS employees detect suspect patterns of immigration fraud, they refer the case to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to determine whether the case should be pursued criminally. If so, ICE conducts a criminal investigation and upon proving fraud, pursues prosecution by the U.S. Attorney’s office. If ICE decides not to conduct a criminal investigation, the case is returned to USCIS, who then conducts an administrative investigation through its Office of Fraud Detection and National Security. Should that administrative investigation substantiate the fraud, USCIS will deny the immigration benefit and place the applicant into possible removal proceedings.

– USCIS –

On March 1, 2003, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) became one of three former INS components to join the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. USCIS is charged with fundamentally transforming and improving the delivery of immigration and citizenship services, while enhancing the integrity of our nation’s security.