

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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***For Immediate Release***

## **Tax Preparers and Recruiter Who Preyed on Immigrants Sentenced To Prison**

***Operators of El Cajon tax preparation businesses filed hundreds of false tax returns with stolen identities***

**NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY** – June 19, 2017

SAN DIEGO – Two local tax preparers and their recruiter were sentenced today in federal court to 30 months in prison for their involvement in a tax preparation scam that resulted in the filing of hundreds of false returns, the theft of dozens of victims’ personal information and the receipt of more than \$882,000 in bogus federal income tax refunds.

U.S. District Judge Roger T. Benitez sentenced Rahim Ali Cummings and Rashad Abdul-Rahim for conspiring to commit mail fraud, file false claims for tax refunds, fraudulent use of a Social Security number (SSN) and aggravated identity theft; Ebrahim Ashamu was sentenced for filing false claims for tax refunds and aggravated identity theft. Each of the defendants has been in custody since last year.

As detailed in their plea agreements, between September 2011 and September 2012, Cummings and Ashamu prepared and filed the false tax returns out of their businesses in El Cajon, California, and employed the services of Abdul-Rahim to recruit customers and obtain stolen identities. Abdul-Rahim solicited and obtained the personal identifying information from the victims using false pretenses, such as informing the victims they could obtain “free” government money from alleged grant and senior programs, and concealing the fact that their personal information would be used to file false tax returns. Abdul-Rahim then provided Cummings and Ashamu with the personal information of the victims, which they used to prepare and file the false tax returns with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). An investigation by IRS, Criminal Investigation and the United States Secret Service showed that Cummings, Ashamu, and Abdul-Rahim defrauded customers from their ethnic community, many of whom were immigrants from countries such as Somalia and Nigeria who knew very little, if anything, about the United States tax laws.

Cummings, Ashamu, and Abdul-Rahim did not shy away from personally profiting from their fraudulent scheme. Each defendant directed the fraudulent tax refunds to be deposited into bank accounts under their control and ordered U.S. Treasury checks to be mailed to addresses under their control. In particular, Cummings received approximately \$470,042 in fraudulent refunds deposited into bank accounts he controlled. Ashamu received approximately \$367,631. Abdul-Rahim received approximately \$44,937 in fraudulent refunds and additional cash payments from Cummings and Ashamu for providing the victims’ personal information. As a result of their crimes, Cummings, Ashamu and Abdul-Rahim caused approximately \$882,610 in losses to the IRS. Each defendant has been ordered to make full restitution to the IRS for the total amount of false refunds they each received.

Following today’s sentencing hearing, Cummings, Ashamu, and Abdul-Rahim will be permanently enjoined from preparing or filing federal income tax returns for anyone other than themselves. A civil complaint will be filed against them, and a permanent injunction will be entered to prevent Cummings, Ashamu and Abdul-Rahim from acting as a tax preparer in the future.

“This type of fraud increases the burden on honest taxpayers and negatively impacts honest citizens’

confidence in our tax system,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Alana W. Robinson. “The combination of tax fraud and identity theft continues to be a challenging law enforcement problem. Unscrupulous tax preparers and their associates should take notice: if you defraud the IRS and unsuspecting members of the public, law enforcement will bring you to justice and seek to hold you accountable.”

“Today, justice is served, and these three individuals are being held accountable for their criminal actions,” stated R. Damon Rowe, Special Agent in Charge for IRS Criminal Investigation. “IRS special agents work diligently to identify and bring to prosecution those who use taxpayer’s personal identifying information to file fraudulent tax returns. It’s a matter of maintaining public confidence in the integrity of the U.S. tax system and protecting the identities of those we serve.”

“Identity theft and the unauthorized use of individuals’ personal identifying information continues to impose significant financial harm to American citizens and businesses,” said David J. Murray, Special Agent-in-Charge of the San Diego Field Office of the Secret Service. “The sentences imposed today should be a reminder that the United States Secret Service will continue to collaborate with its law enforcement partners and the United States Attorney’s Office to arrest and prosecute criminals who take advantage of innocent victims for their own economic gain.”

The public is reminded that tax-related identity theft occurs when someone uses your stolen SSN (or the SSN of a dependent) to file a tax return claiming a fraudulent refund. If your SSN is compromised and you know or suspect you are a victim of tax-related identity theft, the IRS recommends these additional steps:

- Respond immediately to any IRS notice; call the number provided.
- Complete IRS Form 14039, Identity Theft Affidavit, if your e-filed return is rejected because of a duplicate filing under your SSN. Attach the completed form to your return and mail according to instructions.
- Continue to pay your taxes and file your tax return, even if you must do so by paper.
- If you previously contacted the IRS and did not have a resolution, you may contact them for specialized assistance at 1-800-908-4490.

Link: The link to IRS Form 14039 = <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f14039.pdf>

**DEFENDANTS**

**Criminal Case No. 16CR0768-BEN**

Rahim Ali Cummings	Age: 47	Detroit, Michigan
Ebrahim Ashamu	Age: 58	El Cajon, California
Rashad Abdul-Rahim	Age: 46	El Cajon, California

**CHARGES THAT DEFENDANTS CUMMINGS AND ABDUL-RAHIM SENTENCED ON:**

Count 1 – Title 18, United States Code, Section 286 – Conspiracy to Commit Mail Fraud, File False Claims, Fraudulently Use a Social Security Number of Another, and Aggravated Identity Theft  
Maximum penalties: 5 years in prison, \$250,000 fine, 3 years of supervised release.

**CHARGES THAT DEFENDANT ASHAMU SENTENCED ON:**

Count 33 – Title 18, United States Code, Section 287 – Filing False, Fictitious and Fraudulent Claims  
Maximum penalties: 5 years in prison, \$250,000 fine, 3 years of supervised release.

Count 56 – Title 18, United States Code, Section 1028A – Aggravated Identity Theft  
Maximum penalties: Mandatory 2-year sentence, to be served consecutive to any other prison term, \$250,000 fine, 3 years of supervised release.

**INVESTIGATING AGENCIES**

Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation  
United States Secret Service