



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Three Individuals Indicted for Visa Fraud Scheme for Profit

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USCIS Assisted in Investigation of Defendants who Provided Armenian Nationals with Fake Dance Certificates and Staged Photos in Traditional Costumes to Qualify for P-3 Visa Program for Entertainers

NEW YORK - A 15-count indictment was unsealed yesterday in federal court in Brooklyn charging Stella Boyadjian, Hrachya Atoyan and Diana Grigoryan, also known as “Dina Akopovna,” for their roles in a multi-year visa fraud scheme that brought Armenian citizens into the United States for profit. The defendants are charged with multiple counts of visa fraud and with conspiring to defraud the United States, commit visa fraud and illegally bring aliens into the United States. Boyadjian and Grigoryan are also charged with related money laundering charges, and Boyadjian is charged with aggravated identity theft. Boyadjian was arraigned yesterday before United States Magistrate Judge James Orenstein. Atoyan’s initial appearance for removal proceedings to the Eastern District of New York was scheduled for Thursday, in the Central District of California.

Richard P. Donoghue, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, John P. Cronan, Acting Assistant Attorney General of the United States Justice Department’s Criminal Division, and Christian J. Schurman, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security and Director for Diplomatic Security Service, United States Department of State, announced the charges.

“As alleged in the indictment, the defendants choreographed their fraud scheme by dressing visa applicants in traditional dance costumes and creating fake concert flyers in order to deceive a government program that allows foreign nationals to temporarily enter the United States as artistic performers,” stated United States Attorney Donoghue. “As a result of outstanding investigative work and commitment to protecting the integrity of the immigration process by this Office and our law enforcement partners, the defendants will now face the music for their alleged crimes.”

“Fighting fraud and ensuring the integrity of our immigration system are major priorities for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. This case demonstrates the lengths that fraudsters will go to try to evade our nation’s immigration laws...and it demonstrates the lengths we’ll go to stop them to protect national security and the American people,” said Thomas M. Cioppa, New York District Director, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

“Fraudsters who undermine our immigration system threaten our public safety and our national security,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Cronan. “The Justice Department will not tolerate abuses of our nation’s immigration laws like those alleged in the indictment unsealed today. We will root out immigration fraud and bring those responsible to justice.”

“The Diplomatic Security Service is firmly committed to protecting the integrity of all U.S. visas and travel documents – especially those, like the P-3 visa, which allow for entertainers to visit the U.S. to perform in culturally unique events and deepen our understanding of different cultures,” stated Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Schurman. “This case is the result of a strong partnership among federal law enforcement agencies and DSS’ global network of special agents working together to stop visa and passport crimes and stop criminals from earning illegal income by exploiting U.S. visas, passports, and foreign workers.”

As alleged in the indictment, the defendants were engaged in a widespread visa fraud scheme to illegally bring foreign nationals (“Aliens”) into the United States by fraudulently claiming to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (“USCIS”) that they were members of traditional Armenian performance groups and thus qualified for P-3 visas as “culturally unique” artists or entertainers.

The P-3 nonimmigrant visa classification allows foreign nationals to temporarily travel to the United States to perform, teach or coach as artists or entertainers, under a program that is culturally unique. A United States employer or sponsoring organization is required to submit a USCIS Form I-129 Petition for a Non-Immigrant Worker, along with supporting documentation, attesting that the performances in the United States are culturally unique.

As alleged in the indictment, Boyadjian ran a non-profit organization called Big Apple Music Awards Foundation Inc. (“BAMA”), based in Rego Park, New York, which she and her co-conspirators used to further their visa fraud scheme. As part of the scheme, the defendants and their co-conspirators solicited Aliens and charged them fees ranging from \$3,000 to \$15,000 per Alien applicant to fraudulently obtain P-3 visas by submitting false Forms I-129 and supporting documents to the USCIS. Upon approval of the Form I-129 petitions, the defendants and their co-conspirators acquired fraudulent dance certificates and organized staged photo sessions where foreign nationals wore Armenian dance costumes to make it appear as though they were traditional Armenian musicians, singers and performers. After being trained how to falsely answer questions during visa interviews, the P-3 visa applicants presented these fake certificates and photos during their P-3 visa interviews. Once in the United States, some beneficiaries of the P-3 visas paid the defendants an additional fee to be included in applications for extensions of their fraudulently obtained visas. The defendants furthered their visa fraud scheme by creating flyers and other documents purporting to hold BAMA-sponsored concerts and events in the United States.

The charges announced today are merely allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

This case is a joint investigation by the Diplomatic Security Service’s Criminal Investigations Division and Overseas Criminal Investigations Divisions, with assistance from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate.

The government’s case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney David Gopstein and Trial Attorney Sasha N. Rutizer of the Criminal Division’s Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section.

The Defendants:

STELLA BOYADJIAN
Age: 47
Rego Park, New York

HRACHYA ATOYAN
Age: 30
Glendale, California

DIANA GRIGORYAN (also known as “Dina Akopovna”)
Age: 41
Yerevan, Armenia

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 18-CR-57 (MKB)

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