

FRI, DEC 1, 2017

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Sex Traffickers Cash in on Surge of Cuban Migrants to US

Written by James Bargent - November 4, 2016

Cuba

Human Trafficking

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The Miami apartment where Morales alleged held his victims



The case of a sex trafficking ring that ensnared Cuban women in prostitution in Miami suggests human traffickers are capitalizing on the recent surge of Cubans seeking entry to the United States.

Details have emerged of the sex trafficking case about to be brought against a Cuban US resident, Silvio Clark Morales, who stands accused of smuggling women into the United States then forcing them into sex work, [the Miami Herald reported](#).

According to court documents from the case, Morales recruited women in Cuba with the promise of passage to the United States. He allegedly offered to transport the women for a \$20,000 fee, which they would pay off through jobs he would find them as strippers. However, on their arrival, Morales would up the debt to \$55,000 and force them into prostitution to pay it off.

Prosecutors believe Morales' network stretched through Cuba, Mexico, and Central America, according to the Herald. Many of his alleged victims passed through Mexico on their way to the United States, and a man claiming to be Morales' associate described to TV channel Univision how they relied on corrupt Mexican officials and

lawyers to facilitate this flow.

The victims alleged that Morales threatened and beat them, while the associate said Morales forced the women to have sex with him, and even threatened their families in Cuba if they challenged him.

Police were alerted to Morales' operations when two of his accusers escaped from the apartment where they said he was holding them.

InSight Crime Analysis

The number of Cubans entering the United States spiked dramatically after US President Barack Obama announced measures to thaw diplomatic and commercial relations between the countries in late 2014. Some experts have [linked](#) the growth in Cuban migration to fears that improved relations could end the special status currently enjoyed by Cuban migrants, which allows them to enter and stay in the United States without a visa.

According to government [data](#) analyzed by the Pew Research Center, 46,635 Cubans entered the United States in the first 10 months of 2016, compared to 24,278 in all of 2014.

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Such a surge presents an opportunity for sex traffickers, who can capitalize on the rush to emigrate by offering false promises of work and a new life in the United States in order to entrap women.

Nevertheless, the Miami Herald reported that the charges against Morales represent “the first known criminal case involving Cuban women brought to the United States for sexual exploitation.”

The US State Department currently considers Cuba a “[Tier 2](#)” country for human trafficking having upped its status from the lowest Tier 3 ranking in 2014 in response to the government's anti-trafficking measures, many of which focused on sexual exploitation. The State Department's most recent annual human trafficking report ([pdf](#)) notes the sex trafficking of Cubans in the Caribbean and South America, but not the United States.

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