

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Thomas Woman Arrested for Smuggling and Harboring Multiple Illegal Immigrants for Prostitution

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ST. THOMAS — United States Attorney for the District of the Virgin Islands Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced Tuesday that a complaint has been filed charging Ramona Rivera Luna with alien harboring and importation of aliens for immoral purposes.

According to court documents filed in the case, Ramona Rivera Luna, a citizen of the Dominican Republic, was arrested on Friday, October 30, 2020. Earlier that day, federal agents executed a search warrant at The Embers Guest House, which the defendant owns and operated for over 15 years.

Federal agents discovered seven female immigrants from the Dominican Republic and Venezuela whom the defendant is alleged to have smuggled into St. Thomas by others, after having lured the females to work for her with the false offer of legitimate bartending and server jobs. Once the women arrived in St. Thomas, they were forced to engage in commercial sex acts, with the proceeds used to pay off their respective smuggling debts, which ranged from \$8,000 to \$15,000, and to pay the defendant \$200 a week for rent.

According to the court, the women had to obtain permission and pay to leave the premises for any reason, including merely running errands such as to the grocery store, paying a \$150 exit fee. Court documents allege that the defendant maintained her control over the women with threats of possible violence and near constant surveillance—the premises were equipped with video cameras, all of which were connected to a DVR found in the defendant's bedroom.

This case is being investigated by Homeland Security Investigations, with assistance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and the United States Postal Inspection Service. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Meredith Edwards.

A complaint is merely a charging document, and it is not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law