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PRESS RELEASE

Maryland Resident Sentenced to Over Five Years in Federal Prison for Illegally Transporting Firearms with Obliterated Serial Numbers and Smuggling Firearms to Nigeria

Friday, May 26, 2023

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Maryland

Baltimore, Maryland – U.S. District Judge Richard D. Bennett sentenced Wilson Che Fonguh, age 41, of Bowie, Maryland, yesterday to 63 months in federal prison, followed by two years of supervised release, for conspiracy, for transporting firearms with obliterated serial numbers, and for smuggling firearms and ammunition from the United States to Nigeria. Judge Bennett

also ordered Fonguh to pay a fine of \$25,000. Fonguh was convicted of those charges on May 6, 2022, along with co-defendants Eric Fru Nji, age 42, of Fort Washington, Maryland and Wilson Nuyila Tita, age 47, of Owings Mills, Maryland, after a two-week trial.

On May 22, 2023, Judge Bennett sentenced co-conspirator Roger Akem, age 52, of Woodbury, Minnesota, to two years in federal prison, followed by two years of supervised release, for his role in the smuggling operation.

The sentence was announced by Erek L. Barron, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland; Special Agent in Charge James C. Harris of Homeland Security Investigations (“HSI”) Baltimore; Special Agent in Charge Toni M. Crosby of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (“ATF”) Baltimore Field Division; and Special Agent in Charge Christopher Dillard of the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, Defense Criminal Investigative Service (“DCIS”) - Mid-Atlantic Field Office.

According to the evidence presented at trial, from at least November 2017 through July 19, 2019, Fonguh and his co-defendants conspired with each other and with others to export firearms, ammunition and other military typed items from the United States to Nigeria. Specifically, the evidence at trial established that Fonguh and his co-conspirators secreted 38 firearms, 28 of which had the obliterated serial numbers in a shipping container that they sent out of the Port of Baltimore in January of 2019. The guns included sniper rifles, SKS assault rifles (some with bayonets), other rifles and several handguns. There were 44 high-capacity magazines, two rifle scopes and over 35,000 rounds of ammunition.

As detailed in trial testimony, Fonguh and his co-conspirators contributed funds for the purchase of firearms, ammunition, reloading materials and other equipment for shipping overseas to separatists fighting against the Government of Cameroon. According to their plea agreements, co-defendant Tamufor St. Michael, Roger Akem and others purchased the ammunition, firearms, and other military-type items, both online and in person. The evidence proved that Fonguh and his co-conspirators concealed the firearms, ammunition, rifle scopes, and other items in duffle bags and heavily wrapped packages inside sealed compressor units, placing those items into a shipping container destined for Nigeria. Fonguh and his co-conspirators communicated about their efforts and plans to ship weapons and ammunitions using an on-line encrypted messaging application and code words in order to conceal their activities.

Tamufor St. Michael, age 42, of Rosedale, Maryland, Akem, and three co-conspirators pleaded guilty to their roles in the conspiracy and were sentenced to between two years and 46 months in federal prison. A ninth co-conspirator also pleaded guilty and is awaiting sentencing.

United States Attorney Erek L. Barron commended HSI, the ATF and DCIS for their work in the investigation. Mr. Barron recognized the U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Export Enforcement; the U.S. Department of State, Diplomatic Security Service; the Naval Criminal Investigative Service; and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service for their contributions to the investigation. U.S. Attorney Barron thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Kathleen O. Gavin, who is prosecuting the case.

For more information on the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office, its priorities, and resources available to help the community, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/community-outreach>.

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