

Beat: News

Cameroonian Citizen Sentenced for Online Pet Purchasing Conspiracy

Scheme to Trick American Consumers

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USPA NEWS - A Cameroonian national was sentenced April 28th to 21 months in prison and two years of supervised release for his role in a scheme to trick American consumers into paying fees for pets that were never delivered and for using the COVID-19 crisis as an excuse to extract higher fees from victims.

"The Department of Justice will pursue criminals anywhere in the world when they target and exploit American consumers through fraud schemes, including when they take advantage of the circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic," said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Brian M. Boynton, head of the Justice Department's Civil Division. "We appreciate our partners at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Pennsylvania and the FBI, as well as the assistance from Romanian law enforcement in arresting and extraditing this defendant."

Desmond Fodge Bobga, 29, was extradited to the United States from Romania in April 2021. According to court documents, from approximately June 2018 to approximately June 2020, Bobga conspired with others to offer pets for sale on internet websites. He and others communicated by text message and email with potential victims to induce purchases. Following each purchase, Bobga and co-conspirators claimed that a transportation company would deliver the pet and provided a false tracking number for the pet. Bobga and his co-conspirators, posing as the transportation company, then claimed the pet transport was delayed and that the victim needed to pay additional money for delivery of the pet.

Bobga and co-conspirators told some victims that they needed to pay more money for delivery because the pet had been exposed to COVID-19. The perpetrators used false promises and bogus documents regarding shipping fees and COVID-19 exposure to extract successive payments from victims. Once Bobga and the co-conspirators received money directly and indirectly through wire communications from the victims, they never delivered any pets.

"While many people came together to support each other during the pandemic, this defendant chose to use COVID-19 as a means to defraud the victims in this matter and he will now serve a prison sentence to answer for that crime," said U.S. Attorney Cindy K. Chung. "Our office remains committed to addressing all types of fraud committed in relation to the pandemic."

"Mr. Bobga was a scam artist, plain and simple," said FBI Pittsburgh Special Agent in Charge Mike Nordwall. "He exploited those who were looking for comfort during the COVID pandemic and cashed in at their expense. The FBI is firmly committed to holding fraudsters like Mr. Bobga accountable."

The FBI's Pittsburgh Field Office investigated the case. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs provided substantial assistance. Law enforcement authorities in Romania, including the Romanian National Police, Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and the Cluj Brigade for Combating Organized Crime, provided significant cooperation.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher M. Cook for the Western District of Pennsylvania and Trial Attorney Wei Xiang of the Civil Division's Consumer Protection Branch prosecuted the case.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The task force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of Justice's

National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

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