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**TRAFFICKED WORKERS VINDICATED, AWARDED OVER \$15 MILLION  
IN DAMAGES AND FEES AND A CHANCE AT A NEW LIFE IN THE U.S.**

**LOS ANGELES** – Fourteen months after they bravely filed suit against their traffickers, 11 workers from the Philippines finally won vindication. On May 2, 2016, Judge Fernando M. Olguin of the United States District Court for the Central District of California granted to the workers a default judgment of \$15.2 million in damages and fees. The workers were trafficked to the United States to serve as domestic servants and back-of-the-house employees at two high-end bakeries owned by defendants Analiza and Goncalo Moitinho de Almeida.

“It is always an inspiration whenever individuals like the L’Amande workers gather the courage to stand up for their rights,” said Christopher Lapinig, Skadden Fellow and Registered Legal Services Attorney at Advancing Justice-LA. “Unfortunately, time and time again, we see exploitative employers—often with the help of friends and family—resort to fraud and other unlawful activity to escape accountability for their labor abuses. With this judgment, we hope to make clear to such employers that they can no longer act with impunity.”

The defendants subjected the workers to abusive conditions, including workdays as long as 17 hours and wages as low as three dollars an hour. They verbally abused the workers, referred to them as “dogs,” and imposed \$11,000 in debt bondage on each worker. The defendants also threatened to cancel the workers’ visas and harm them and their families in the Philippines. On March 18, 2015, with the help of Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Los Angeles (Advancing Justice-LA) and the law firm Latham & Watkins LLP, the workers sued the defendants for human trafficking, RICO violations, and violations of federal and state labor, retaliation, and whistleblower laws.

“Because of this judgment, all the heartache and suffering we had to endure because of Ana’s greed has not been for nothing,” said Gina Pablo, one of the workers.

Shortly after the lawsuit was filed, the Almeidas rapidly began liquidating their assets, including fraudulently encumbering and selling their million-dollar residence in Rolling Hills Estates, California, to keep the property and the proceeds from its sale out of the workers’ hands. The workers amended the complaint to add fraudulent transfer claims. By August 2015, the defendants had fled overseas and instructed their lawyers to “take no further action in defending the lawsuit.”

Judge Olguin granted all 12 claims for which the workers sought judgment and awarded the full amount of damages the workers requested. Judge Olguin also voided the defendants' fraudulent transfers and took steps to prevent them from further moving their assets. Advancing Justice-LA and Latham & Watkins are now pursuing steps to enforce the judgment.

"We are thrilled that the court has awarded the entirety of the requested relief, especially after the defendants did everything in their power, including breaking the law, to avoid accountability to our clients," said Sid Nadkarni, associate at Latham & Watkins.

Advancing Justice-LA has also secured special immigration status for the workers as victims of human trafficking, which also provides work authorization so the workers can begin rebuilding their lives and reunite with their families.

"I'm so relieved about the judgment. All the stress that we went through is over. All the fears that the Almeidas imposed on us are gone. We can now focus on our new jobs and look forward to reuniting with our family soon," said Armelinda de la Cerna, another worker.

*\*Interviews can be arranged. Media should contact [rbunnao@advancingjustice-la.org](mailto:rbunnao@advancingjustice-la.org) to request.*

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*Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Los Angeles (Advancing Justice-LA) is the nation's largest legal and civil rights organization for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (NHPI). Through direct services, impact litigation, policy advocacy, leadership development, and capacity building, Advancing Justice-LA focuses on the most vulnerable members of Asian American and NHPI communities while also building a strong voice for civil rights and social justice.*