Beat: News

Haitian Gang Leader Charged for Conspiracy to Commit Hostage Taking

16 U.S. Missionaries in Fall 2021

Washington, D.C., 11.05.2022, 20:08 Time

USPA NEWS - A Haitian national was indicted today by a federal grand jury in the District of Columbia for conspiracy to commit hostage taking for his role in the armed kidnapping of 16 U.S. citizens in Haiti in the fall of 2021. The victims were Christian missionaries serving in Haiti and most of them were held captive for 61 days before escaping.

The indictment charges Joly Germine, 29, also known as “Yonyon,” who is described as a leader of the 400 Mawozo gang. He is the first defendant to be charged in connection with the missionaries’ kidnapping. Germine was previously charged with firearms trafficking in a separate case in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. The Haitian government transferred Germine from a Haitian jail into U.S. custody on May 3, 2022, on the basis of an arrest warrant in that matter, and Germine has since been detained in the District of Columbia.

“This case shows that the Justice Department will be relentless in our efforts to track down anyone who kidnaps a U.S. citizen abroad,” said U.S. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. “We will utilize the full reach of our law enforcement authorities to hold accountable anyone responsible for undermining the safety of Americans anywhere in the world.”

“Today’s indictment demonstrates that the United States will not tolerate crime against our citizens, here or abroad,” said FBI Director Christopher Wray. “The FBI will continue to work aggressively with our international partners to keep our citizens safe and bring perpetrators to justice.”

“This indictment is a step towards achieving justice for the victims who were volunteering their services in Haiti when they were kidnapped and held for weeks on end,” said Matthew M. Graves, U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia. “Along with our law enforcement partners, we are committed to holding accountable those who carry out acts of violence against Americans abroad to further their own aims.”

The charges brought today are related to the Oct. 16, 2021, kidnapping of 17 Christian missionaries near Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Sixteen of the kidnapping victims were U.S. citizens, including five children, one as young as eight months old.

According to the indictment, Germine, who was in a Haitian prison at the time of the kidnapping, directed and asserted control of 400 Mawozo gang members’ kidnapping operations, including ransom negotiation for the hostages’ release. One of the gang’s stated goals in holding the hostages was to secure from the Haitian government Germine’s release from prison. Germine is alleged to have been in regular contact with other 400 Mawozo leaders about the hostages’ kidnapping, captivity, and ransom. Two of the hostages were released on or about Nov. 20, 2021, and three more were released on or about Dec. 5, 2021. The remaining hostages escaped captivity on or about Dec. 16, 2021.

Germine will have his initial appearance in the case tomorrow in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

The charges in the indictment are merely allegations, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law. If convicted of any offense, a defendant’s sentence will be determined by the court based on the advisory Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The case is being investigated by the FBI’s Miami Field Office. Valuable assistance was provided by the Haitian National Police. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Karen P. Seifert, with assistance from Paralegal Specialist Jorge Casillas and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Hunter Deeley, of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia.

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Source: Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Columbia press release May 10, 2022

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-20721/haitian-gang-leader-charged-for-conspiracy-to-commit-hostage-taking.html

Editorial office and responsibility:
V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Wendy Westhoven, in Hungary

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619