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## Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# Florida Residents Charged with Conspiring to Violate Iran Sanctions, Other Crimes

Three Florida residents have been charged in federal district court in Miami with crimes related to their alleged violations of U.S. sanctions on Iran, and money laundering.

Defendants Mohammad Faghihi, 52, his wife Farzaneh Modarresi, 53, and his sister Faezeh Faghihi, 50, operated Florida company Express Gene. According to the criminal complaint affidavit, between October 2016 and November 2020, Express Gene received numerous wire transfers from accounts in Malaysia, the People's Republic of China, Singapore, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates, totaling almost \$3.5 million. It is alleged that some of the money received was used by Express Gene and its principals to purchase genetic sequencing equipment from U.S. manufacturers and ship them to Iran without a license from the Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) to export the machines, despite sanctions on Iran. The incoming money also was used by F. Faghihi and Modarresi to fund the 2019 purchase of the Express Gene property, says the affidavit.

On Feb. 20, Faghihi arrived at Miami International Airport from Iran, where he was inspected by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers. According to the charging documents, during his inspection by CBP officers, Faghihi made false statements, including that he did not practice his profession in Iran or conduct any type of research in Iran. In fact, according to the affidavit, Faghihi was the director of a laboratory within Shiraz University of Medical Science in Iran bearing his name: "Dr. Faghihi's Medical Genetic Center,". In addition, his luggage contained 17 vials of unknown biological substances covered with ice packs and concealed beneath bread and other food items, according to the affidavit. All the vials were subject to regulations.

From approximately 2013 to approximately 2020, Faghihi was an Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences at the University of Miami (UM), Miller School of Medicine. During this period, he was the principal investigator on several National Institute of Health (NIH) grants awarded in February 2013, December 2016 and June 2017. It is alleged that Express Gene and Faghihi received large deposits from international wires during this period, but they were not disclosed as required to either UM or NIH's financial conflict of interest reporting system.

Defendants made their initial federal court appearances today. Their pretrial detention hearings will take place tomorrow, Sept. 15, at 10:00 a.m. in federal magistrate court in Miami.

All defendants are charged with conspiring to commit an offense against the United States and conspiring to commit money laundering. Faghihi and Modarresi are also charged with the unlawful exports of goods to Iran, and smuggling goods out of the United States. Faghihi and F. Faghihi were charged with smuggling goods into the United States and making false statements. Faghihi is further charged with wire fraud.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Mark J. Lesko for the Justice Department's National Security Division; Acting U.S. Attorney Juan Antonio Gonzalez for the Southern District of Florida; Special Agent in Charge George Piro of the FBI's Miami Field Office; and Director Vernon Foret of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Miami Field Office made the announcement.

FBI Miami and CBP Miami are investigating the case. The University of Miami provided invaluable assistance.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Thakur and Senior Litigation Counsel Randy Hummel of the Southern District of Florida and Trial Attorney Menno Goedman of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section are prosecuting the case.

*A criminal complaint is merely an allegation, and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.*

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**Component(s):**

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

National Security Division (NSD)

USAO - Florida, Southern

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