**PRESS RELEASE**

March 15, 2019

**Chinese construction workers sue Saipan casino and its Chinese contractors for forced labor scheme in U.S. federal court**

SAIPAN -- Seven Chinese construction workers, who labored on the Imperial Pacific casino and resort project in Saipan, part of the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (“CNMI”), have amended their lawsuit in the federal district court there to allege that they were victims of a forced labor scheme. The First Amended Complaint brings claims under the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act and the CNMI Anti-Trafficking Act, as well as claims under CNMI law for the injuries they suffered on the project. Plaintiffs are seeking monetary compensation for their injuries and pain and suffering, as well as punitive damages.

Aaron Halegua, an attorney based in New York who is assisting in representing Plaintiffs, stated, “Many foreign migrant workers suffer injuries and endure abuse, but have no access to a remedy. Fortunately, because these events occurred in a U.S. Commonwealth, the plaintiffs are protected under U.S. law.”

Imperial Pacific International (CNMI), LLC (“Imperial Pacific”) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Hong Kong-based company, Imperial Pacific International Holdings Limited. Imperial Pacific hired multiple Chinese construction firms to build its casino and resort in Saipan (the “Casino Project”), who then employed the seven Plaintiffs and thousands of other workers. The contractors included MCC International Saipan Ltd. Co. (“MCC”), which is alleged to be a subsidiary of a Chinese state-owned conglomerate, and Gold Mantis Construction Decoration (CNMI), LLC (“Gold Mantis”), whose alleged parent company is traded on the Shenzhen Stock Exchange.

The First Amended Complaint, filed March 15, 2019, alleges that “Plaintiffs and many of the other Chinese construction workers on the Casino Project paid large recruitment fees for jobs in Saipan based on the promise of good conditions, high wages, legal work status, and immigration benefits.”

According to the First Amended Complaint, “Plaintiffs paid fees sometimes exceeding U.S. $8,000 to recruiters in China”, often having “to borrow money from loan sharks at high interest rates, using their land or homes as collateral… Although Plaintiffs had been promised that they could work in Saipan for multiple years or even obtain green cards, they later learned that they lacked legal authorization to work in Saipan.”

It is alleged that, “Plaintiffs were required to work over 12 hours per day without any rest day, and sometimes were forced to work a 24-hour shift. Even though Plaintiffs’ pay rate was already below the legal minimum wage, their employers systematically withheld a portion of their earned wages and often failed to pay them anything for weeks at a time. Plaintiffs were crammed into dormitories, some of which had no showers or air-conditioning. Their supervisors yelled and cursed at them, and forced them to pay fines if they did not work hard enough or arrived late. The Imperial Pacific construction site was also extremely dangerous. The injury incidence rate exceeded the national average as untrained and inexperienced workers were pushed to work around-the-clock while basic safety precautions were ignored.”

“Despite the dehumanizing conditions of their employment, Plaintiffs were coerced into continuing to work for their employers. Plaintiffs faced immense pressure to repay the large (and growing) debts incurred in China, and were told by their employers that if they left their job, nobody else would hire them. One Gold Mantis supervisor, who had already physically beaten another employee, threatened to kill Plaintiffs if they disobeyed him. MCC and Gold Mantis managers also repeatedly told them that because they were in Saipan illegally, it would be useless to complain to the authorities.”

As for Imperial Pacific, the First Amended Complaint alleges, “Imperial Pacific knew about or, at a minimum, recklessly disregarded its contractors’ exploitative and illegal practices…. However, rushing to complete the project, rather than remedy the situation, Imperial Pacific and its contractors sought to conceal their illegal scheme from government authorities, medical providers, and any other party that might hold them accountable. Imperial Pacific and its contractors denied entry to an investigator from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration …who came to inspect safety conditions on the worksite. The unauthorized Chinese workers were also told to hide when government inspectors did come to the worksite or dormitories.”

According to the First Amended Complaint, “Each Plaintiff suffered a physical injury while working for Gold Mantis on the Imperial Pacific project, including a badly burnt leg, scalded hand, and partially severed finger…. After they were injured, Gold Mantis refused to take the workers to the hospital and threatened Plaintiffs that they risked being deported if they sought medical attention on their own.” It is alleged that the Plaintiffs have returned to China, but have not received a penny of compensation for their injuries.

Plaintiffs are represented by Bruce Berline, Esq. of Berline & Associates, LLC. Aaron Halegua, an attorney based in New York, is assisting in representing Plaintiffs. Defendant Gold Mantis is represented by Tiberius D. Mocanu of the Law Offices of Stephen Nutting, LLC. The case is *Tianming Wang, et al. v. Gold Mantis Construction Decoration (CNMI), LLC, et al.*, Civil Case Number 18-0030.

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