

# Nigerian National Pleads Guilty to Role in \$8 Million Federal Emergency Benefits Fraud Scheme

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**For Immediate Release**

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Maryland

**Greenbelt, Maryland** – On Friday, February 28, Newton Ofioritse Jemide, 47, a Nigerian national, pled guilty to a federal charge for wire fraud conspiracy. Jemide, who was recently extradited from France, was involved in a scheme to fraudulently obtain federal benefits.

Kelly O. Hayes, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced the plea with Joseph V. Cuffari, Inspector General for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS); Acting Special Agent in Charge (SAC) Colleen Lawlor, Social Security Administration (SSA) Office of Inspector General – Philadelphia Field Division; and Special Agent in Charge Matt McCool, U.S. Secret Service – Washington Field Office.

“Mr. Jemide and his co-conspirators’ greed and utter disregard for the suffering of those who need national emergency assistance, by stealing from the government, will not be tolerated,” said United States Attorney Hayes. “The District of Maryland U.S. Attorney’s Office and our partners will continue to hold those accountable who try to defraud our government through fraud, waste, and abuse during times of crisis.”

“Today’s guilty plea sends a clear message that individuals who defraud the federal government for their own personal gain will be identified and held accountable,” said U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Inspector General Joseph V. Cuffari, PhD. “DHS-OIG is grateful for our continued partnership with our law enforcement partners as we continue fighting waste, fraud, and abuse.”

During the timeframe covered by the indictment, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provided emergency benefits and compensation for damages to victims affected by declared national emergency disasters, such as hurricanes and wildfires. Among other benefits, an individual in an area affected was immediately eligible for Critical Needs Assistance (CNA) to purchase life-saving or life-sustaining materials. Victims could decide how to receive assistance payments, which included deposits on prepaid debit cards.

According to the guilty plea, in 2016 and 2017, Jemide and others from Nigeria directed co-conspirators living in the United States to purchase hundreds of Green Dot Debit Cards. Co-conspirators living in Nigeria then registered the cards with Green Dot using stolen personal information from identity theft victims around the United States. Jemide and his co-conspirators used an encrypted messaging application and other means to communicate.

In 2017, following Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, and the California wildfires, Jemide, and other co-conspirators from Nigeria, used stolen personal information to apply online for FEMA and CNA benefits. FEMA dispersed \$500 per claim on the Green Dot Debit Cards that co-conspirators purchased for a total of at least \$8 million.

“Bringing these criminals to justice prevents further victimization of American taxpayers and abuse of the programs put in place as safety nets for the most vulnerable in our country,” said SAC McCool. “This investigation underscores the Secret Service’s global reach and steadfast commitment, in collaboration with our partner agencies, to combat cyber-enabled financial crimes and relentlessly pursue those committing them.”

In addition to filing false disaster-assistance claims with FEMA, Jemide and co-conspirators also submitted false online claims for Social Security benefits, IRS tax refunds, and other government benefits using stolen identities of multiple individuals, including names, addresses, social security numbers, and other personal identifiers.

“Newton Ofioritse Jemide and his co-conspirators misused Social Security numbers to steal government funds via SSA’s online services. The misuse of SSA’s e-Services to defraud SSA and rightful beneficiaries and recipients will not be tolerated at any level,” said Acting SAC Lawlor. “Our office will continue to investigate those who abuse SSA programs and operations, including its e-Services, for their own selfish gain. I thank our law enforcement partners for their assistance and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for prosecuting this complex case.”

As a result of fraudulent submissions, FEMA and the other federal agencies deposited benefits onto the Green Dot Debit Cards. The funds were deposited on the debit cards using multiple stolen identities, including identities different from the identities used to register the cards. Jemide and select co-conspirators informed other co-conspirators when the fraudulent funds became available on the debit cards and gave them information to cash out the funds from the cards in exchange for a commission. Additionally, the co-conspirators took steps to conceal their identities by enlisting others to make purchases and withdrawals; utilizing multiple store and bank locations and methods of withdrawal; and making money orders payable to other individuals and/or corporate entities.

Jemide faces a maximum sentence of 30 years in federal prison for conspiracy to commit wire fraud. Actual sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalties. A federal district court judge determines sentencing after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other

statutory factors. Sentencing is currently scheduled for July 1, 2025, at 9:30 a.m., before U.S. District Court Judge Deborah K. Chasanow.

United States Attorney Hayes commended DHS-OIG, SSA-OIG, and USSS for their work in the investigation and thanked the Justice Department's Office of International Affairs and the United States Marshals Service for their valuable assistance in securing the extradition of Jemide to the United States. Ms. Hayes also thanked Assistant United States Attorneys Elizabeth Wright and Darren Gardner who are prosecuting the federal case.

For more information about the Maryland U.S. Attorney's Office, its priorities, and resources available to help the community, please visit [www.justice.gov/usao-md](http://www.justice.gov/usao-md) and <https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/community-outreach>.

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