

Police in Ontario free 43 Mexicans brought to Canada by alleged human traffickers



Mexicans trapped in 'modern-day slavery' as pay from their cleaning work was controlled by traffickers: OPP

Muriel Draaisma · CBC News · Posted: Feb 11, 2019 12:44 PM ET | Last Updated: February 11



Forty-three Mexicans, brought to Canada, have been freed from the control of alleged human traffickers. Here is an example of the accommodations in which some of them lived. (Ontario Provincial Police)

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vacation properties in Central and Eastern Ontario to work, police said on Monday.

All were freed last Tuesday following a joint investigation that involved the OPP, Barrie Police Service and Canada Border Services Agency.

"Human trafficking is modern-day slavery," OPP Deputy Commissioner Rick Barnum told reporters in Barrie. "Exploitation is the key element of this offence."

Police said the traffickers allegedly controlled the pay made by the workers. The victims had paid the traffickers large amounts of money to leave Mexico and were charged fees for transportation and lodgings.

The Mexicans worked at locations in Collingwood, Innisfil, Oro-Medonte and Cornwall, Ont., police said.

In some cases, police said the Mexicans, after paying various fees, were left with less than \$50 a month.



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'This morning, I woke up a free man'

One victim reportedly told investigators: "Last night, I went to bed a slave. This morning, I woke up a free man."

The alleged traffickers have not been arrested or charged.

A number of sources told police last year that a Barrie-based cleaning company, run by two people, was trafficking and defrauding the Mexican-born workers.



OPP Deputy Commissioner Rick Barnum says: 'Human trafficking is modern-day slavery. Exploitation is the key element of this offence.' (CBC)

The Mexicans had been brought to Canada "under the pretense" of being here for educational purposes or the promise of work visas and eventually permanent residency status.

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Investigators are digging into the background of the "two people" who ran the cleaning company but they have not been charged.

Labour human trafficking 'very disturbing,' police say

Barrie Police Chief Kimberley Greenwood said the joint investigation involved what she called a "labour human trafficking" situation. She called it "very disturbing."

She said labour human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation and harbouring of people for the purposes of exploitation for forced labour. It is not confined to large urban centres, she added.



Barrie Police Chief Kimberley Greenwood says: 'Whether it involves forced labour or the sex trade, the

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"It is inconceivable that this was taking place in our community," she said.

Greenwood said the 43 were brought "under misleading circumstances," promised safer lives and more opportunities. "These individuals are now free from the control of the people who wished to exploit them for personal gain," she said.

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After the victims were rescued, Greenwood said they went to a Barrie and Area Victim Services centre, where they were offered hot showers, food and clothing, and given medical assessments. Interpreters were made available, she said.

"I am pleased to announce that all of the victims have been offered employment and accommodations at a local resort," she said.

"Whether it involves forced labour or the sex trade, the trafficking of humans is unacceptable. It has no place in our communities and will not be tolerated."



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All of the Mexicans brought to Canada by alleged human traffickers were freed last Tuesday. (Ontario Provincial Police)

The OPP declined to name the hotels and vacation properties where the men worked and the cleaning company in Barrie.

Criminal charges may be announced at a later date and police said they are looking for other suspects.

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