

FBI, Hawks net R100m internet scam suspects

Eight foreign nationals, aged between 33 and 52, were on Tuesday morning arrested for their links to an alleged R100m internet scam during a large-scale operation in Cape Town.



Source: [Pexels](#)

The group was arrested in a joint operation led by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), United State Secret Service (USSS) Investigations, Interpol and with assistance from the Hawks Serious Commercial Crime Investigation unit.

Also assisting in the operation was Crime Intelligence (CI), K9, National Intervention Unit, Special Task Force (STF), Tactical Operations Management Section (TOMS), Criminal Record Centre and Cape Town Metro police.

The suspects are alleged to have been involved in money laundering and international-wide scale financial fraud.

In a statement, the Hawks said the operation was initiated based on the Mutual Legal Assistance from Central Authorities of the United States of America that was approved by the Republic of South Africa.

Hawks spokesperson, colonel Katlego Mogale, said all suspects will be charged with a variety of financial crimes, including conspiracy to commit wire/mail fraud and money laundering.

“The suspects in this investigation are alleged to have ties to a transnational organised crime syndicate originating in Nigeria.

“It is alleged that these suspects preyed on victims, many of whom are vulnerable widows or divorcees, who were led to believe that they were in genuine romantic relationships but were scammed out of their hard-earned money.”

Mogale said the suspects used social media websites, online dating websites to find and connect with their victims.

Another modus operandi used by the suspects was business emails, where email accounts were diverted in order to change banking details.

“They assumed fake names and trolled dating sites.

“Once they had ingratiated themselves to their victims, they allegedly concocted sob stories about why they needed money – i.e., taxes to release an inheritance, essential overseas travel, crippling debt, etc., and then siphoned money from victim’s accounts to the amount of R100 million.”

Mogale said the crimes allegedly committed by the suspects hit close to home.

“Neighbours, parents, friends and family would be targets of this organisation.

“The fraudsters intimidated and berated their victims, ruined their lives and then disappeared. We are confident that this investigation will have a significant impact on this region and beyond,” said Mogale.

The FBI estimates that more than 100 people lost more than R100m in romance scams from 2011 till to date.

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