

Two Senior Leaders Of Lev Tahor Sect Sentenced To 12 Years In Prison For Kidnapping And Sex Trafficking Crimes

Nachman Helbrans and Meyer Rosner Orchestrated a scheme to Kidnap 14-Year-Old Girl to Return Her to Her Child Marriage

Damian Williams, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that NACHMAN HELBRANS and MAYER ROSNER were sentenced today to 12 years in prison for child sexual exploitation offenses and kidnapping. The defendants, leaders of an extremist religious sect called Lev Tahor, masterminded a scheme to kidnap a 14-year-old girl (“Minor-1”) and a 12-year-old boy (“Minor-2”) from their mother in Woodridge, New York. The defendants then smuggled the children across the U.S. border to Mexico, where they reunited Minor-1 with her adult “husband” to allow him to continue his illegal sexual relationship with Minor-1. HELBRANS and ROSNER were convicted in November 2021 following a four-week jury trial before U.S. District Judge Nelson S. Román.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams stated: “No mother should ever have to wake up to find her children missing. And no child should ever be forced into a sexual relationship. Today’s sentencings send a clear message: those who kidnap and sexually exploit children will be prosecuted and punished to the full extent of the law.”

According to the allegations contained in the Superseding Indictment, other court filings, and the evidence presented at trial:

NACHMAN HELBRANS and MAYER ROSNER are U.S. citizens and senior leaders of Lev Tahor, an extremist religious sect that has been located in several different jurisdictions, including New York, Israel, Canada, Mexico, and Guatemala. HELBRANS became the leader of Lev Tahor in or about 2017 and ROSNER served as a top lieutenant. After HELBRANS and his leadership team took over, they seized tight control over the group and embraced several extreme practices, including child marriages and underage sex.

In or about 2017, HELBRANS arranged for his then-12-year-old niece, Minor-1, to be “married” to a then-18-year-old man. Though they were never legally married, they were religiously “married” the following year, when Minor-1 was 13 and her “husband” was 19. Lev Tahor leadership, including HELBRANS and ROSNER, required young brides such as Minor-1 to have sex with their husbands, to tell people outside Lev Tahor that they were not married, and to lie about their ages. For example, HELBRANS and ROSNER instructed child brides to deliver babies inside their homes instead of at a hospital, to conceal the mothers’ young ages from outsiders.

In or about October 2018, the mother of Minor-1 determined that it was no longer safe for her children to remain in the Lev Tahor community, which was then living in Guatemala. The mother escaped from the group’s compound and arrived in the United States in early November 2018, and was eventually joined by all six of her children, including Minor-1. Also in November

2018, a Brooklyn family court granted her sole custody of the children and prohibited the children's father, a leader within Lev Tahor, from communicating with the children.

After the mother fled and settled in New York with her children, HELBRANS and ROSNER devised a plan to kidnap Minor-1, then 14 years old, to return her to Guatemala and to her then-20-year-old "husband." In December 2018, they kidnapped Minor-1 and her brother in the middle of the night from a home in upstate New York and transported them through various states and, eventually, to Mexico. In order to carry out the kidnapping, the defendants used disguises, aliases, drop phones, fake travel documents, and an encrypted application. At the time of the kidnapping, Lev Tahor leadership was seeking asylum for the entire Lev Tahor community in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Following a three-week search involving hundreds of local, federal, and international law enforcement entities, Minor-1 and Minor-2 were recovered in Mexico and returned to New York. In or about March 2019 and March 2021, members of Lev Tahor again tried to kidnap the children but were unsuccessful.

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In addition to the prison sentences, NACHMAN HELBRANS, 40, and MAYER ROSNER, 45, were sentenced to five years of supervised release.

Mr. Williams praised the outstanding work of the FBI, the New York State Police, the Sullivan County District Attorney's Office, United States Customs and Border Protection, the Rockland County Sheriff's Department, the Village of Spring Valley Police Department, Special Agents with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, the Department of State, the Transportation Security Administration, and our law enforcement partners in Mexico, Guatemala, Canada, and Israel.

This case is being handled by the Office's White Plains Division. Assistant United States Attorneys Sam Adelsberg, Jamie Bagliebter, Jim Ligtenberg, and Daniel Tracer, and paralegal specialist Shannon Becker, are in charge of the prosecution.

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Leaders of radical religious sect sentenced for Sullivan County kidnapping, sex trafficking

- [April 1, 2022](#)
- 5:24 am





NEW YORK – Two leaders of the Lev Tahor extremist religious sect were sentenced in federal court on Thursday to 12 years in prison for child sexual exploitation and kidnapping.

Nachman Helbrans, 40, and Mayer Rosner, 45, are US citizens and senior leaders of the group that has been located in several areas including New York, Guatemala, Israel, Canada and Mexico.

The two men, with ties to Rockland and Sullivan counties, masterminded a scheme to kidnap a 14-year-old girl and her 12-year-old brother from their mother in Woodridge and then smuggled them across the US border into Mexico where they reunited the girl with a man who was her so-called “adult” husband to allow them to continue his illegal sexual relationship.

In 2017, Helbrans arranged to have his then 12-year-old niece to be “married” to a then 18-year-old man. They were never legally married but were religiously “married” the following year when the girl was 13 and the man was 19.

Lev Tahor leadership, including Helbrans and Rosner, required young brides such as this young girl, to have sex with their “husbands,” to tell people outside the sec that they were not married, and to lie about their ages.

Helbrans and Rosner instructed child brides to deliver babies inside their homes instead of at a hospital to conceal the mothers’ young ages from outsiders.

In addition to federal prison time, the two men were sentenced to five years of supervised release.