



Four Gambian Embassy diplomats and three employees have been jailed for 33 years for selling 'duty free tobacco' on the open UK market.

UK HM Revenue & Customs reports that all seven worked at the Gambian Diplomatic Mission in London and abused their diplomatic privileges by purchasing large quantities of tobacco tax-free from specialist duty free sales companies, International Diplomatic Supplies and Chacalli De Decker.

Unknown to their suppliers, these individuals then sold the tobacco on the UK black market at a profit, without accounting for either taxes or duties – having long established a ready-made network for the goods within London's Gambian community.

Yusupha Bojang (54), Gaston Sambou (39), Georgina Gomez (30), Ebrima John (38), Veerahia Ramarajaha (54), Audrey Leeward (49), and Hasaintu Noah (60), were all found guilty of illegally selling 26 tonnes of hand rolling tobacco and failing to account for nearly £4.8m (\$7.5m) in lost revenue, following an investigation by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC).



From left to right: The passport photographs (supplied by HMRC) of the four Gambian Embassy diplomats who are now in jail: John Ebrima (6 years); John Yusupha Bojang (7yrs); Georgina Gomez (5yrs); and Gaston Sambou (6yrs).

The investigation team found that the fraud had taken place for a number of years and officers focused on sales and purchases between 2009 and 2012. *[As is well understood in the DF&TR business, embassy rules allow diplomats to legitimately buy tobacco free from excise duty and VAT for personal use, but they are not allowed to sell it on-Ed].*

Martin Brown, Assistant Director, Criminal Investigation for HMRC commented: "Diplomats are allowed duty free goods for their personal use, but the system works on trust. These individuals abused that trust by selling vast amounts of hand rolling tobacco on the black market, thinking they were beyond the reach of the law – they were wrong.

"Investigators found an established supply network for the tobacco had been built up over a number of years. Excise evasion is a serious offence and, as this case shows, HMRC will not hesitate to take action where we find evidence of fraud.