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Nigerian e-mail scams taking on language of faith

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Mrs. Sikiratu Seki Adams of Nigeria doesn't really want to donate \$6 million to your church.

In fact, the e-mail that says she does probably wasn't sent by anyone with that name. It's just another variation on one of the most prevalent frauds perpetrated over the Internet, according to the FBI, Secret Service and a host of other scam-watcher groups.

Last year, Nigeria ranked first among all countries beyond the United States as the source of Internet scams, according to the Internet Fraud Complaint Center, a joint effort between the FBI and the National White Collar Crime Center. Most were variations on what law-enforcement officials call a "419 scam," a reference to the section of Nigerian law that covers advance-fee fraud.

One of the latest variations begins by offering "Calvary greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." The writer then claims to be a new Christian convert dying of breast cancer and the widow of a former military official killed in the Gulf War. She wants to donate \$6 million of her late husband's money to your church or ministry to further evangelism and

ministry to the poor.

Another new version claims to be from the legal adviser to a Nigerian Christian couple who died in a plane crash last year and left him \$20 million to distribute to Christian ministries. If you will use these funds “honestly for things that will glorify God's name,” then he would like to give you the money.

Previous versions of the Nigerian scams have outlined a person's urgent need to get money out of the country before it is seized. The writer wants to deposit millions of dollars in the recipient's bank account for safekeeping and pledges to pay 10 percent to 15 percent to the recipient.

The scam-busting website Urban Legend Zeitgeist (www.urbanlegends.com) explains the set-up: “If you take the bait, you'll be contacted by the perpetrators, who'll attempt to establish their credibility as government officials, businessmen or bankers. They will offer you apparently valid bank accounts and documentation. But before you can collect your money, some problem arises. A bribe must be paid to an official or a fee or tax must be paid so the money can be transferred. And you as the victim will be asked to pay up in order to receive the promised big payoff. There is no end to the fees, bribes, even outright blackmail, that will be extorted from you.”

In some cases, those caught up in the scam have traveled to Nigeria or other African or European countries to try to collect their money and have met with violence, the website reports.

The Internet Fraud Complaint Center reports that Nigerian scams like this produced the highest median dollar losses among all Internet fraud last year. The median loss of all reported cases was \$3,864, higher than reported cases of identity theft (\$2,000) and check fraud (\$1,100).

The FBI warns Internet users to “be skeptical of individuals representing

themselves as Nigerian or other foreign government officials asking for your help in placing large sums of money in overseas bank accounts. Do not believe the promise of large sums of money for your cooperation.”

Further, the FBI warns, do not give personal information about savings, checking, credit or other financial accounts to people who solicit you by e-mail.

For more information, visit the Internet Fraud Complaint Center at <http://ifccfbi.gov/strategy/nls.asp>.

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