

Acclaimed San Francisco chef's restaurant group sued for labor violations



Chef Michael Mina.

TODD JOHNSON | SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS TIMES

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San Francisco Business Times

Jun 18, 2018, 10:00am PDT **Updated** Jun 18, 2018, 2:05pm

Update: In a statement The Mina Group sent to the San Francisco Business Times, the group said it is committed to adhering to all employment laws and requirements, including meal and rest periods and other provisions in the California Labor Code.

"As a longstanding member of San Francisco's restaurant community, we value all of our employees above all else, and are investigating these allegations. At no time has anyone from [the] Mina Group authorized or condoned the activities alleged."

Acclaimed Chef Michael Mina's restaurant group has been hit by a class-action lawsuit alleging inadequate compensation, among other labor violations.

The lawsuit was filed in the San Francisco Superior Court last week against The Mina Group, which directly and indirectly employs about 2,500 people.

The San Francisco Chronicle was the first to report on allegations that the group's management rarely paid employees on time, didn't provide accurate itemized wage statements, didn't allow for adequate meal and rest periods, and did not pay accrued wages to former workers.

The class action includes testimonies from current and former workers collected over the past four years.

Scott Cole & Associates President Scott Cole, an employment and consumer law attorney representing the workers, said in a statement that the "Mina Group is a fine company but, when you break the law, and your workers suffer, you don't get special treatment."

Cole did not respond to further requests for comment.

The lawsuit is a blow for what had been a celebratory year for the award-winning chef. Mina recently unveiled a revamped concept for his namesake restaurant in the Financial District and told the San Francisco Business Times that his team of employees is the bedrock of his culinary success.

"Constantly, as you grow, you have to make sure that the things you cherished and that help you achieve your goals aren't lost as a group," Mina said. "Your focus is always taking care of the customer, but if there is growth for everyone working in the restaurant, it will end up being a better experience for the customer. That's the biggest challenge now: making sure that philosophy never goes out of the restaurant."

The Mina Group has expanded quickly since it was founded in 2003. It now operates nine restaurants in the Bay Area and more than 37 around the world. Several of his locations, particularly those located in hotels, have staff that aren't directly employed by the Mina Group, but the chef said his company still recruits and trains those workers for the restaurants that he operates.