

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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## ***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney  
Karen P. Hewitt***

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***For Further Information, Contact: Assistant U.S. Attorney Steve Miller (619) 557-5432***

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***For Immediate Release***

### **NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY** - March 13, 2008

United States Attorney Karen P. Hewitt announced the unsealing of an indictment charging eight individuals with alien smuggling. On March 7, 2008, a federal grand jury sitting in San Diego handed up the indictment, which was unsealed today. The defendants were arraigned on the charges earlier today before Magistrate Judge Anthony J. Battaglia.

According to the indictment, Marisela Castro-Juarez, Marisa Melena Mafnas, David Montes, Julie Hernandez, Randal Mark Panter, Lorenzo Pecoraro, Jose Parada-Velazquez, and John Walter Schuh. are each charged separately with Conspiracy to Smuggle Aliens, as well as individual counts of either bringing aliens to the United States for financial gain or transportation of aliens within the United States. Additionally, Marisela Castro-Juarez is charged with engaging in financial transactions of over \$10,000, with money derived from alien smuggling, and engaging in financial transactions with money derived from alien smuggling with the intent to avoid the federal monetary reporting requirements. The indictment also seeks forfeiture of a house in Chula Vista, as well as over \$598,000.

The charges stem from an investigation entitled “Operation Blackjack” by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection targeting a long-term alien smuggling organization.

The indictment alleges that, since 2001 the organization, led by defendant Marisela Castro-Juarez, was responsible for smuggling numerous undocumented aliens concealed within special dashboard compartments or inside vehicle trunks. Additionally, numerous cash transactions involving proceeds of the alien smuggling operation were identified and included in the charges of the indictment. The indictment further alleges that over \$598,000 were proceeds from the alien smuggling operation and that certain of those proceeds were used to purchase a house in Chula Vista.

United States Attorney Hewitt stated, “This alien smuggling organization profited upon desperate individuals willing to try any means to unlawfully enter the United States. We are committed to prosecuting those individuals who traffic in humans in Southern California.”

“This case is a perfect example of the extreme measures human smuggling organizations go to with little or no regard for human safety,” said Miguel Unzueta, Special Agent in Charge for ICE investigations in San Diego.

“This 30-month joint investigation illustrates CBP's intent not only to apprehend smugglers at the ports of entry but to launch strategic enforcement efforts aimed at dismantling smuggling organizations,” said Gurdit Dhillon, CBP Director of Field Operations for San Diego.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Steve Miller, who is prosecuting the case, the defendants are next scheduled to be in court on March 18, 2008, at 3:00 p.m. for a detention hearing before Magistrate Judge Anthony J. Battaglia.

## DEFENDANTS

Case No. 08cr0682-JLS

Marisela Castro-Juarez  
Marisa Melena Mafnas  
David Montes  
Julie Hernandez  
Randal Mark Panter  
Lorenzo Pecoraro  
Jose Parada-Velazquez  
John Walter Schuh

## SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Title 18, United States Code, Section 371 and Title 8, United States Code, Section 1324 (Conspiracy to Transport and Bring Aliens to the United States)  
Penalties: Maximum 5 years in prison, \$250,000 fine

Title 8, United States Code, Section 1324(a)(2)(B)(ii) (Bringing Aliens to the United States for Financial Gain)  
Penalties: Mandatory minimum 3 years in prison, maximum 10 years in prison, \$250,000 fine.

Title 8, United States Code, Section 1324(a)(1)(A)(ii) and (v)(II) (Transporting and attempting to transport Aliens within the United States)  
Penalties: Maximum 10 years in prison, \$250,000 fine.

Title 18, United States Code, Section 1957 (Engaging in financial transaction of over \$10,000 with proceeds of specified unlawful activity)  
Penalties: Maximum 10 years in prison, \$250,000 fine.

Title 18, United States Code, Section 1956(a)(1)(B)(ii) (Engaging in financial transaction with proceeds of specified unlawful activity with the intent to avoid federal monetary reporting requirements)  
Penalties: Maximum 20 years in prison, \$500,000 fine.

Title 18, United States Code, Section 982(a) (Forfeiture)

## AGENCIES

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Department of Homeland Security

**An indictment itself is not evidence that the defendants committed the crimes charged. The defendants are presumed innocent until the Government meets its burden in court of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.**