



Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

09/17/08

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TWO ATLANTA “OPERATION CONFLUENCE” INDICTMENTS PART OF NATIONWIDE “PROJECT RECKONING” DRUG TAKEDOWN

U.S. Attorney General in Atlanta Announces Aggressive Bust of Massive Cocaine & Marijuana Ring Operating in Metro Atlanta and Across U.S.

Atlanta, GA - Two indictments unsealed yesterday in Atlanta charge a total of 34 defendants involved with nationwide drug distribution and transportation “cells” that coordinated the distribution of millions of dollars worth of cocaine and marijuana in the United States and return of the proceeds to Mexico. Code-named “Operation Confluence,” the Atlanta case is part of a multi-jurisdictional takedown including “Operation Dos Equis,” “Operation The Family,” “Operation Stinger,” and “Operation Vertigo,” all part of related national arrests and searches executed throughout the day yesterday. (NEWS MEDIA NOTE: See related national news release from the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C.)

In a news conference announcing the nationwide takedown at DEA’s Atlanta Division headquarters, Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey said, “By spreading dangerous drugs and resorting to brutal violence, international drug cartels pose an extraordinary threat both here and abroad. The scope of the threat demands a deliberate and sustained response and the success we have had, such as the takedowns announced today, is due to the combined efforts of federal, state, local and international law enforcement. Although I am pleased with the efforts so far, we cannot and will not rest on these successes. The threat posed by international drug cartels is too great. It will take all of us working together to prevail.”

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias said, “Metro Atlanta unfortunately continues to be a major drug distribution center for the Southeast and beyond. The DEA and our many other law enforcement partners continue to aggressively investigate all aspects of the drug trade. This major case is another example of their effective, coordinated efforts. The two cartel cells indicted in Atlanta acted like many shipping businesses, coordinating the transportation of truckloads of hidden drugs and millions of dollars in currency across the country and to and from Mexico. Through our sophisticated investigation and prosecutions, we have disrupted these organizations, seized large amounts of their poisons and proceeds, and now will work hard to lock up their members for many years to come.”

Rodney G. Benson, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA Atlanta Field Division said, “Our success with this operation came as a direct result of the spirited cooperation between our law enforcement counterparts on all levels. We have set the bar high and have achieved great results. These high-level drug trafficking organizations were dismantled at their highest ranks. Our ultimate goal, however, is to completely eradicate these criminal enterprises and we will not rest until this mission is achieved.”

According to the two indictments and information presented in court: Investigative information identified a metro Atlanta-based drug distribution cell and a transportation cell being run out of Texas and operating in several cities including Atlanta. The drug money generated by the Atlanta drug distribution cell was shipped to Texas and then Mexico via tractor trailer. The transportation cell arranged for truck drivers to meet with drug traffickers and receive drug proceeds, which were concealed among the legitimate cargo being hauled, to such cities as Atlanta; Jackson, Mississippi; Memphis; Indianapolis; and Austin, Texas. Using court-approved wiretaps of drug phones, extensive surveillance, and coordinated police traffic stops, the multi-state federal, state, and local investigation culminated in multiple arrests and seizures on the morning of September 16, 2008. Members of the transportation cell are charged with aiding and abetting the Atlanta drug organization's drug conspiracy, by participating in laundering its money.

“Project Reckoning,” a multi-agency law enforcement effort led by the DEA, targeted the Mexican drug trafficking cartel known as the Gulf Cartel. Federal or state charges have been unsealed against multiple defendants in multiple districts. The Gulf Cartel is responsible for the transportation of multi-ton quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin and marijuana, from Colombia, Guatemala, Panama and Mexico to the United States as well as the distribution of those narcotics within the United States. The Gulf Cartel is also believed to be responsible for laundering multiple millions of dollars in criminal proceeds. Individuals indicted in the cases are charged with a variety of crimes, including: drug trafficking charges related to cocaine and marijuana; solicitation and conspiracy to kidnap; attempted murder; conspiracy to use a firearm in a violent crime; conspiracy to kill and kidnap in a foreign country; interstate and foreign

travel in aid of racketeering; money laundering; and other related crimes.

To date, Project Reckoning has resulted in the arrest of 332 individuals and the seizure of approximately \$57.7 million in U.S. currency, 16,347 kilograms of cocaine, 485 pounds of methamphetamine, 19 pounds of heroin, 51,147 pounds of marijuana, 114 vehicles and 116 weapons. Project Reckoning, a 15-month investigation, combined into one centrally coordinated effort several multi-district enforcement operations that all involved individuals with close ties to the Gulf Cartel. Operation Dos Equis, Operation Vertigo, Operation Stinger and Operation The Family as well as numerous local operations, such as Georgia's "Operation Confluence" combined to form Project Reckoning.

Named in Atlanta in the first indictment of the alleged drug distribution cell are the following defendants:

- EDGAR RODRIGUEZ-ALEJANDRO, a/k/a "TEMO," 20, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, allegedly a leader of the Atlanta-based drug trafficking organization who coordinated drug and money pickups and deliveries on numerous occasions. RODRIGUEZ-ALEJANDRO was arrested by Gwinnett County Police on May 13, 2008, while in possession of \$7.65 million and 12 kilograms of cocaine. He is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, Three, Four, Five Six, Eight and Fourteen for Money Laundering, Seven and Fifteen for Possession with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine, and Twelve for Cocaine Distribution.
- JOSE LUIS HERNANDEZ, a/k/a "LUIS," a/k/a "ZAMBO," 32, of Sugar Hill, Georgia, allegedly was involved in the distribution of multi-kilogram amounts of cocaine and the collection of drug proceeds. He is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, and Three, Five, and Eight for Money Laundering.
- OSCAR ARIAS-REYES, a/k/a "OJOS," 23, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, allegedly was involved in the distribution of multi-kilogram amounts of cocaine and the collection of drug proceeds. He is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, Nine for Cocaine Distribution, and Eleven, Sixteen, Seventeen and Eighteen for Money Laundering.
- EDER JONATHAN MORA QUEZADAS, 20, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, allegedly was a worker for RODRIGUEZ-ALEJANDRO, and was arrested by Gwinnett County on May 13, 2008, while in possession of \$7.65 million and 12 kilograms of cocaine. He is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, Three, Four, Five, Six, and Eight for

Money Laundering, and Fifteen for Possession with Intent to Distribute Cocaine.

•GUSTAVO MARTINEZ, 22, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, allegedly was a worker for RODRIGUEZ-ALEJANDRO, who was arrested by Gwinnett County on May 13, 2008, while in possession of \$7.65 million and 12 kilograms of cocaine. He is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, Three, Four, Five, Six and Eight for Money Laundering, and Fifteen for Possession with Intent to Distribute Cocaine.

•FNU LNU #1, a/k/a “TOMAS,” age unknown, of Sugar Hill, Georgia, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, Nine for Cocaine Distribution, and Seventeen for Money Laundering.

•JUAN SALINAS GONZALEZ, a/k/a “CHUKI,” 32, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, Three, Four, Five, Six, Eight, Eleven, and Fourteen for Money Laundering, and Nineteen for Possession with the Intent to Distribute Marijuana.

•PASCUAL MARROQUIN-ALVAREZ, a/k/a “MUSICO,” 43, of Norcross, Georgia, allegedly was a drug distributor for the organization. He is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, and Seven for Possession with Intent to Distribute Cocaine.

•ROSARIO VANESSA ZAVALA, a/k/a “PODEROSA,” 30, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana.

•RAFAEL CRUZ-FUENTES, a/k/a “TIGRILLO,” 29, of Pasadena, Texas, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, and Seventeen for Money Laundering.

•FNU LNU #2, a/k/a “PELON,” age unknown, of Mexico, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana and Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy.

•JIMMY QUIROZ BALDWIN, a/k/a “CALAMACO,” age unknown, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, allegedly was a drug distributor for the organization and is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana and Ten for Possession with Intent to Distribute Cocaine.

•FNU LNU #3, a/k/a “XICO,” or “JICO,” age unknown, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, is

charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana.

•GUERO ROLANDO, age unknown, of Mexico, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana and Thirteen for Possession with Intent to Distribute Cocaine.

•ROBERTO GUILLEN, 20, of Mexico, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, and Thirteen for Possession with Intent to Distribute Cocaine.

•JORGE GONZALEZ VASQUEZ, age unknown, of Mexico, allegedly was arrested in possession of 400 pounds of marijuana on August 26, 2008. He is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, and Nineteen for Possession with Intent to Distribute Marijuana.

•JOSE FRANCISCO ALCORTA, 40, of Laredo, Texas, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, and Three for Money Laundering.

•JAIME ELOY URESTI, 35, of Laredo, Texas, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, and Four for Money Laundering.

•JUAN G. VIRAMONTES, a/k/a “MALDITO,” 40, of Laredo, Texas, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, Five and Fourteen for Money Laundering.

•DAVID GONZALES, JR., 28, of Laredo, Texas, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy and Six for Money Laundering.

•RODOLFO IBARRA, JR., 29, of Laredo, Texas, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, and Six for Money Laundering.

•RICARDO ARMENDARIZ, 29, of Laredo, Texas, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, and Eight for Money Laundering.

•PEDRO GUERRERO, a/k/a “POLLO,” 26, of Laredo, Texas, is charged in Count One for Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Marijuana, Two for Money Laundering Conspiracy, and Eleven for Money Laundering.

Named in the second indictment of the alleged transportation cell are the following defendants:

•ANDRES CAVAZOS, JR., a/k/a “JUNIOR,” a/k/a “ANDY,” 34, of Weslaco, Texas, is charged in Count One for Money Laundering Conspiracy, Two for Conspiracy to Aid and Abet in Distribution of Cocaine and Marijuana, and Three, Four, Five and Six for Money Laundering.

•JUAN ANDRES CORTEZ, a/k/a “ANDRES,” a/k/a “CACHETES,” 37, of Edinburg, Texas, is charged in Count One for Money Laundering Conspiracy, Two for Conspiracy to Aid and Abet in Distribution of Cocaine and Marijuana, and Four and Six for Money Laundering.

•GILBERTO ALMAZAN BOTELLO, a/k/a “GIL,” 44, of McAllen, Texas, is charged in Count One for Money Laundering Conspiracy, Two for Conspiracy to Aid and Abet in Distribution of Cocaine and Marijuana and Six for Money Laundering.

•RICARDO GONZALEZ, a/k/a “NALGAS,” 36, of San Juan, Texas, is charged in Count One for Money Laundering Conspiracy, and Two for Conspiracy to Aid and Abet in Distribution of Cocaine and Marijuana.

•MIGUEL SANCHEZ-GUERRERO, 39, of Rio Grande City, Texas, is charged in Count One for Money Laundering Conspiracy and Two for Conspiracy to Aid and Abet in Distribution of Cocaine and Marijuana.

•ANDRES CAVAZOS, SR., a/k/a “POPS,” a/k/a “JACK,” 51, of Edinburg, Texas, is charged in Count One for Money Laundering Conspiracy and Two for Conspiracy to Aid and Abet in Distribution of Cocaine and Marijuana.

•JAVIER ALBERTO LONGORIA, 39, of Mercedes, Texas, is charged in Count One for Money Laundering Conspiracy, Two for Conspiracy to Aid and Abet in Distribution of Cocaine and Marijuana, and Three, Four and Six for Money Laundering.

•DAVID DEANDA, 42, of Welesco, Texas, is charged in Count One for Money Laundering Conspiracy, Two for Conspiracy to Aid and Abet in Distribution of Cocaine and Marijuana, and Four, Five and Six for Money Laundering.

•PEDRO ANDRES PINEDA, a/k/a “TOCAYO,” 39, of Weslaco, Texas, He is charged in Count One for Money Laundering Conspiracy.

•EDDY SALINAS, 32, of Weslaco, Texas, is charged in Count One for Money Laundering Conspiracy.

•NATHAN ZAVALA, a/k/a “NATE,” 38, of Mercedes, Texas, is charged in Count One for Money Laundering Conspiracy and Two for Conspiracy to Aid and Abet in Distribution of Cocaine and Marijuana.

Members of the public are reminded that the indictment contains only allegations. A defendant is presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove a defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of the DEA, along with the Clayton County Police Department, Doraville Police Department, Roswell Police Department, Atlanta Police Department, Cartersville Police Department, Rockdale County Sheriff's Office, DeKalb County Sheriff's Office, Forsyth County Sheriff's Office, Covington Police Department, Norcross Police Department, Hall County Sheriff's Office, Douglasville Police Department, Georgia State Patrol, Henry County Police Department, MCS Narcotics, Spalding County Sheriff's Office, Clarkston Police Department, Duluth Police Department, Conyers Police Department, Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI), East Point Police Department, Gwinnett County Sheriff's Office, Douglas County Sheriff's Office, the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force (HIDTA), and the Gwinnett County Police Department.

Assistant United States Attorneys Sandy Strippoli and David Suchar are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias (pronounced NAH-me-us), United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomeP for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan.