



Department of Justice

United States Attorney Robert E. O'Neill
Middle District of Florida

Tampa

Orlando

Jacksonville

Fort Myers

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CONTACT: STEVE COLE

PHONE: (813) 274-6136

FAX: (813) 274-6300

FT. MYERS CUBAN SMUGGLING ORGANIZATION INDICTED

Fort Myers, Florida - United States Attorney Robert E. O'Neill today announced the arrest of Raul Rodriguez, Rene Alba Fernandez, Sergio Abreu Azcuy and the unsealing of an Indictment charging them with conspiracy to bring aliens into the United States and bringing aliens into the United States. The charges result from smuggling events that took place on December 1, 2007 and April 14, 2008. In total, twenty-three Cuban nationals were successfully smuggled into the United States. Raul Rodriguez is 41 years old and a resident of Lehigh Acres, Florida. Rene Alba Fernandez is 46 years old and a resident of Cape Coral, Florida. Sergio Abreu Azcuy is 27 years old and is a resident of Miami, Florida. Ramon Zambrana is 30 years old and a resident of Charlotte Harbor, Florida, he is also charged in the indictment and is considered a fugitive. If convicted, the defendants would face a minimum term of imprisonment of three years, up to a term of ten years imprisonment and a maximum fine of \$250,000. Included in the indictment is the forfeiture of two vessels, one vehicle and one residence that facilitated or were the proceeds of the illegal activity alleged in the Indictment. Rodriguez, Fernandez, and Azcuy were arrested today and they will make their initial appearances in Ft. Myers federal court this afternoon.

The Indictment charges that Rodriguez, Alba-Fernandez, Zambrana and Abreu-Azcuy agreed to bring Cuban nationals into the United States for private financial gain by at least December 1, 2007 continuing through June 2008. The Indictment also charges two smuggling events that occurred on December 1, 2007 and April 14, 2008. The December 1, 2007 incident was unsuccessful and resulted in the repatriation of twenty Cuban nationals and the federal prosecution and conviction of two Cuban nationals, Jose Bello and Luis Lopez-Cordero, who were previously paroled into the United States. Bello and Lopez-Cordero were the captain and first mate of the December 2007 smuggling vessel. Both have pleaded guilty and Lopez-Cordero was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment. Bello is awaiting sentencing.

The April 14, 2008 smuggling event was successful in bringing twenty-eight (28) Cuban nationals to the United States. Each Cuban national was charged \$10,000 to be brought into the United States. In carrying out the smuggling, the members of the organization utilized go-fast type vessels as well as refueling vessels.

The case was investigated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, United States Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, Lee County Sheriff's Office and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. The case will be prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Jesus M. Casas

_____An Indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent until, and unless, proven guilty.