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TWO DOZEN MEMBERS OF FLORENCIA 13 GANG NAMED IN RICO INDICTMENT THAT ALLEGES DRUG TRAFFICKING AND SHOOTINGS OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS

Second Indictment Charges another 37 Tied to Gang with Narcotics Offenses

A drug task force comprised of federal and state law enforcement authorities this morning arrested 34 people who face federal racketeering and narcotics charges stemming from the activities of the Florencia 13 gang in South Los Angeles. In addition to distribution of methamphetamine and crack cocaine, the charges include shootings of African-Americans in neighborhoods the gang claimed to control.

A total of 61 defendants are named in two indictments – one that charges violations of the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) and one that charges federal narcotics-trafficking violations. The indictments were returned by a federal grand jury on September 27 and were unsealed this morning. The 34 arrests made this morning – 32 pursuant to the federal indictments and two probable cause arrests on state charges – are in addition to 14 defendants who are already in custody on state charges and four who are in federal custody. Eleven defendants are fugitives who are currently being sought by authorities.

The two federal indictments are the result of Operation Joker's Wild, a three-year investigation into Florencia 13 (F13) conducted by the Los Angeles High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force, which is comprised of agents and officers with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department; the Drug Enforcement Administration; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE);

the Los Angeles Police Department; IRS-Criminal Investigation Division; the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Los Angeles County Probation Department. The Bell Gardens Police Department, the South Gate Police Department, the Long Beach Police Department, the Torrance Police Department, the Baldwin Park Police Department, the Azusa Police Department, the United States Marshals Service-led Regional Fugitive Task Force and California parole agents provide substantial assistance.

Controlled by an incarcerated member of the Mexican Mafia prison gang and Mexican Mafia members on the street, F13 controls drug distribution in the unincorporated areas south of the city of Los Angeles and certain other areas such as Huntington Park, according to the RICO indictment. The leaders collect taxes or “rent” from gang members and others who engage in criminal conduct in F13 territory, in return for Mexican Mafia protection when they went to prison or jail.

“The RICO indictment describes how the gang worked to control criminal activity in its territory,” said United States Attorney Thomas P. O’Brien. “The most disturbing aspect of the case is that in working to eradicate rival gangs from streets claimed by Florencia, gang members allegedly engaged in a series of attacks on rival African-American gangs that extended to innocent citizens who ended up being shot simply because of the color of their skin.”

Sheriff Lee Baca stated: “Florencia is a violent street gang that has terrorized communities for several generations. Today, these communities are safer because of the collaboration between the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department; the United States Attorney’s Office; the Drug Enforcement Administration; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department will continue to work alongside federal agencies to utilize all resources available from the federal government to combat gangs.”

In addition to RICO and RICO conspiracy charges, the 53-count indictment includes narcotics and weapons charges and alleges a series of violent crimes in aid of racketeering, including six conspiracies to commit murder and five assaults with deadly weapons. In particular, the indictment alleges that the leaders of F13 directed members to cleanse their neighborhoods of members and associates of African-American street gangs who lived in or near the area controlled by F13. The indictment details a series of attacks against African-Americans, both rival gang members and innocent citizens. The Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department, which has

primary responsibility for patrolling the unincorporated areas south of Los Angeles, has documented more than 80 shootings, including 20 murders, directly linked to the turf war between F13 and rival African-American gangs. One of the acts described in the RICO count concerns the August 2005 shooting of an African-American man who was waiting for a bus in F13 territory.

The RICO indictment also accuses three F13 members in an attempted robbery in the Los Angeles Jewelry District. In August 1996, the three F13 members ambushed two armed security guards who were delivering gold to a shop in the downtown Jewelry Mark. One F13 member was killed, and his two partners escaped without the gold.

The second indictment charges 37 defendants with drug trafficking crimes, money laundering and firearms offenses. This indictment focuses primarily on F13 gang members who allegedly obtained cocaine and methamphetamine from the gang leaders charged in the RICO indictment and resold the narcotics to other Florencia gang members and members of other gangs.

“This case exemplifies the partnership between local, state and federal agencies in attacking the violent crimes that are impacting our community,” said DEA Special Agent in Charge Timothy J. Landrum. “These types of criminals represent the worst of the worst offenders who are committing robberies, trafficking in drugs and putting our citizens in danger.”

ATF Special Agent in Charge John A. Torres stated: “In response to the increase of gang violence committed by Florencia 13, ATF, DEA and LASD joined together to bring their combined experience and resources to curb the violence and drug trafficking, making the community safer for our law-abiding citizens.”

The defendants arrested this morning are expected to make their initial appearances this afternoon before one of several magistrate judges in United States District Court in Los Angeles (the defendants named in the narcotics indictment) and in Santa Ana (the defendants named in the RICO indictment).

Twenty-two of the defendants named in the RICO indictment face sentences of up to life in federal prison. The remaining two defendants face up to 20 years in prison.

The maximum penalty for the 37 defendants named in the narcotics indictment is life without parole in federal prison. All 37 defendants face 10-year mandatory minimum sentences, and most have prior narcotics convictions which will increase their mandatory minimum

sentence to either 20 years (for one prior conviction) or life without parole (for two or more prior convictions).

"This operation demonstrates ICE's continuing resolve to dismantle violent street gangs and disrupt the dangerous criminal activity they're engaged in, including drug trafficking," said Robert Schoch, ICE special agent in charge for investigations in Los Angeles. "Illegal drugs pose a threat to the safety of our communities and ICE is working closely with its law enforcement partners to pursue these types of investigations and see that the perpetrators are brought to justice."

An indictment contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty in court.

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