



Department of Justice

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

Tampa

Orlando

Jacksonville

Fort Myers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: STEVE COLE

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PHONE: (813) 274-6136

<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/flm/pr>

FAX: (813) 274-6300

IIIEGAL ALIENS PLEAD GUILTY TO HOSTAGE TAKING

Tampa, Florida - United States Attorney Robert E. O'Neill today announced that Inocencio Romero-Gonzalez, a 23 year old alien born in Mexico, pleaded guilty yesterday to hostage taking, and to illegal re-entry of a deported alien. On August 1, 2008, a co-conspirator of Romero-Gonzalez, Anastacio Rueda-Flores, a 36 year old alien born in Mexico and illegally present in the United States, also plead guilty to hostage taking. The maximum penalty they face is life imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, and five years of supervised release.

According to the plea agreements, on Tuesday, May 20, 2008, at approximately 2:00 am, Pasco County Sheriff's deputies and Florida Highway Patrol troopers made a vehicle stop on a van on Interstate 75 Northbound at or near mile marker 286 based upon a 911 call alleging kidnapping. A United States Border Patrol (BP) agent also responded to render assistance. The BP agent determined all seven occupants of the stopped vehicle were aliens illegally present in the United States without admission or parole and they were taken into administrative custody for processing and transported to the BP station in Tampa, Florida.

Also at the scene were two witnesses, one of which had made the original 911 call to law enforcement. Both witnesses were aliens, one of which was lawfully in the United States, a legal permanent resident (LPR), and the other illegally in the United States. Both

witnesses made statements to law enforcement. The LPR stated that they had met the van at a gas station (Race Track) on State Route 674 west of Interstate 75 in Hillsborough County, Middle District of Florida in order to pick up the four illegal aliens being transported in the van (later identified as Marcos Landeros-Jiminez, Maximo Landeros-Jiminez, Eliseo Perez-Rodriguez, and Pablo Mendez-Sanchez). The LPR stated that the driver of the van, later identified as defendant Romero-Gonzalez, demanded that he (LPR) pay \$500 per passenger transported before they would be released to him (LPR). When the LPR stated that he would call the police if they didn't release the passengers, Romero-Gonzalez told co-conspirator Anastacio Rueda-Flores to hit the LPR, told the individual who was now in the driver's seat, co-conspirator Alejandro Sanchez-Torres, to drive away, and then jumped back into the van as it sped away with the four transported aliens. The van struck the LPR's vehicle while attempting to depart. The two witnesses then called 911 and followed the van until it was stopped in Pasco County by the above identified law enforcement officers.

Once at the BP station, all occupants of the van were interviewed separately. The four individuals being transported stated they were being transported from Arizona to Florida in order to work here in Florida. Each of the four identified defendant Romero-Gonzalez and co-conspirator Rueda-Flores as the persons that had transported them from Arizona to Alabama and then with the assistance of a third individual (co-conspirator Alejandro Sanchez-Torres) transported them from Alabama to Florida. Each of the transported aliens later identified defendant Romero-Gonzalez as the person who told them not to get out of the van.

Defendant Romero-Gonzalez was interviewed separately and, post-Miranda, admitted he was recruited for \$500 USD by an acquaintance in Phoenix, Arizona to transport the illegal aliens to Florida. Additionally, he admitted that he received \$300 USD

for logistics (i.e. fuel and food). He also admitted to being illegally in the United States.

Co-conspirator Rueda-Flores confirmed that defendant Romero-Gonzalez told him not let the four passengers leave the van without payment and later, during the argument between defendant Romero-Gonzalez and the LPR, told him to hit the LPR. He also confirmed that the van struck the LPR's vehicle when they were attempting to flee from the gas station.

The case was investigated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), United States Border Patrol, Florida Highway Patrol, and the Pasco County Sheriff's Office. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Donald L. Hansen.