



## U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney  
Southern District of Florida*

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### **NEWS RELEASE:**

#### **SIX AIRPORT EMPLOYEES INDICTED FOR STEALING ITEMS FROM CHECKED PASSENGER BAGS**

Marcos Daniel Jiménez, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida; Carlos Alvarez, Director, Miami-Dade Police Department; John P. Clark, Special Agent in Charge, United States Customs Service; and William P. Tompkins, Special Agent in Charge, United States Department of Transportation, Office of the Inspector General, announced today that a federal grand jury sitting in Miami, Florida, returned an indictment charging six employees of Aircraft Services International Group (ASIG), an airport operator company at Miami International Airport (MIA), for conspiracy to use their airport access to steal items contained in the checked luggage of British Airways passengers.

Specifically, the indictment charges that from September 20, 2002 to September 30, 2002, **Jorge A. Benitez, Jose Leon, Onelio Vento, Javier Munoz, Pierre A. Bourdeau, and Maynor Hernandez**, conspired to commit offenses against the United States, that is: (1) to steal the contents of baggage, valued in excess of \$1,000, which came into the possession of any common carrier for transportation in interstate and foreign commerce, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 659; (2) to maliciously enter a vessel containing bonded merchandise with the intent to unlawfully remove baggage, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 549; and (3) to knowingly and willfully enter, in violation of security requirements, an airport area that serves a foreign air carrier, that is, the Air Operations Area ("AOA") of the Miami International Airport, with the intent to commit a felony under the laws of the United States of America and the State of Florida, in violation of Title 49, United States Code, Section 46314. If convicted, the defendants could face a maximum of five years' imprisonment.

The indictment alleges that the defendants were employed by ASIG as ramp agents and were assigned to work British Airways flights at MIA. ASIG was an airport operator company that contracted with British Airways to provide ramp agents at MIA for the purpose of loading and unloading luggage from British Airways flights. As ramp agents, the defendants were issued MIA Secured Identification Display Area (SIDA) access badges and were required to sign a statement acknowledging that they may not use their SIDA badge in violation of any security directive, plan, or program at the airport. Once issued a SIDA badge, employees were prohibited from knowingly or willfully entering a secured area for illegal purposes.



According to the indictment, the defendants worked in groups loading and unloading luggage from British Airways flights. The defendants conducted surveillance and otherwise process luggage in such a manner so as to prevent any interruption of the thefts being committed by other defendants inside the cargo hold. The defendants would use a device known as a "leatherman tool" to break open the zippers of passenger luggage inside the cargo hold and would then steal items from the passenger luggage.

Mr. Jiménez commended the investigative efforts of the Miami-Dade Police Department, the United States Customs Service, and the United States Department of Transportation, Office of the Inspector General. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Teresa Davenport.