

U.S. Attorney Ed Kubo
Announcement of Anti-Cockfighting Measures
And Humane Society of the United States' Animal Fighting Reward Program
August 27, 2008

As you know, in February of this year, we announced that federal charges were filed against Joseph Toralba for smuggling into Hawaii from the Philippines 263 gaffs. His act was in violation of the newly amended federal anti-animal fighting law, and was the first of its kind in the Nation.

This month, U.S. District Judge David Alan Ezra sentenced Mr. Toralba to 60 days imprisonment with a one year period of supervised release. This case sent a clear message --- that those who are involved in any form of cruelty to animals will suffer stiff penalties, because this activity is now not only in violation of state law --- it is also a violation of federal laws.

On August 15th of this month, Louisiana became the last state in the Union to outlaw and ban cockfighting. This signifies that there is no place in our country that recognizes any form of animal fighting. The entire country now agrees that it is cruel and vicious to pit animals against each other until one of them dies a violent death.

At the time of Mr. Toralba's arrest, I said that where ever you saw cockfighting and gambling activities, that organized crime was not far behind. I also said that in the near future we would be re-establishing contact with the local and state police and other agencies to deal with cockfighting and gambling activities in this state.

The time has now come to let you know what I am seeing and what I am proposing to do in this State to stop these illegal activities.

Since April of 2007, we have been noticing an increase in the importation of fighting gaffs into this state. In fact, in the last 16 months, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officials alone have confiscated over 400 gaffs from either in-bound passenger luggage or through the mail from either the Philippines or from Guam. We have also seized various amounts of veterinarian medicine used in furtherance of cockfighting.

On August 4th of this month, Honolulu agents intercepted a mailed parcel from the Philippines to an address in Hawaii. This parcel was opened revealing 24 fighting gaffs, which were thereafter seized. This case is now pending further investigation for possible federal charges.

Up until today, federal Custom investigators have also been given discretion on whether or not to seize small numbers of gaffs or other animal fighting paraphernalia. Effective today, this discretion stops and I am instructing our agencies that all in-coming or outgoing fighting gaffs and paraphernalia and proceeds must be seized and forfeited to the United States Government. We will also work closely with the State prosecutors on deciding which one of us should prosecute these cases.

Additionally, federal prosecutors will be working closely with our County Police Departments and their Vice Divisions. My instructions will be to develop cases so that we can start seizing and forfeiting land and property and proceeds which are used to further any animal fighting or gambling venture. If you are allowing cockfighting on your property, --- be prepared to lose your land.

Finally, I am instructing my federal prosecutors to work with our local police in developing and prosecuting more organized crime cases tied to animal fighting or any other illegal gambling activities in this State. We in law enforcement all know that gambling feeds

organized crime, which could even lead to the corruption of public servants whom we are suppose to trust.

Thus, we have seen law enforcement officers charged with protecting illegal cockfighting activities in Hawaii. Additionally, as with the Pali Golf Course shootings, which happened in the vicinity of innocent golfers, we have also seen organized crime groups fighting and killing each other for control of gambling establishments here in Hawaii.

And, to those out there in our community who would say that cockfighting is just a cultural form of recreation --- I ask, "if this is cultural, then why would you lay money down to bet on which animal will die?" Additionally, of every dollar you bet, a substantial portion of it will go into the pocket of those who are tied to organized crime in Hawaii. This is not cultural, it is against all the state and federal laws in the United States.

Make no doubt about this, --- we intend to become more active in the investigation of these organized crime related cases. We intend to make our state a safer place to live by not allowing Hawaii to become a haven for criminals utilizing animal fighting or gambling for profit.

Now, I will allow Ms. Inga Gibson from the Humane Society of the United States to present their Animal Fighting Reward Program. I am in support of this animal fighting crimestopper program, and I believe this program will assist law enforcement to make more cases in this area with the help of information coming from the public.