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GANG MEMBERS SENTENCED IN FEDERAL COURT

Basaldua, ring leader of this conspiracy, receives life sentence

LAFAYETTE, LA . . . United States Attorney Donald W. Washington, along with the members of the South Central Louisiana Safe Streets Gang Task Force, announced the sentencing of **ARTHUR BASALDUA, BOUNTHONG XAPHILOM, ISRAEL PEREZ, DUC HUU PHAM, ENG CHAMPKUNSING, PHANUT PHONCHINDA, TRAVIS JOSEPH, CHRISTOPHER AUCOIN, MISAY CHANDAKHAM, and SAMUEL THIBODEAUX** in United States District Court before U. S. District Judge Donald E. Walter for drug trafficking charges.

BASALDUA, XAPHILOM, PEREZ, PHAM, CHAMPKUNSING, PHONCHINDA, JOSEPH, AUCOIN and CHANDAKHAM were indicted in October 2007 for conspiracy to import and distribute multi-kilo quantities of methamphetamine from California to Louisiana. The indictment also charged multiple counts of distribution of methamphetamine, firearms violations, distribution of methamphetamine where children reside, multiple counts of possession of stolen motor vehicles, mailing threatening communications, unlawful use of communication facilities, continuing criminal enterprise, forfeiture and carjacking. THIBODEAUX pled guilty in December 2008 to a one-count Bill of Information for possession of a stolen vehicle.

This case was the result of an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Gang Task Force into the trafficking of crystal methamphetamine in Lafayette and Iberia parishes. Members of the Cuatro Flats Gang, based in east Los Angeles, brought the illegal substances to the Acadiana area in a number of stolen vehicles from the Los Angeles area to distribute to several local gangs. The FBI's Safe Streets Gang Task Force is a federally funded initiative which combats violent street gangs.

The facts surrounding the defendants sentenced today are as follows:

ARTHUR BASALDUA, a/k/a Yogi, a/k/a Joey, a/k/a Art, a/k/a Artie, a/k/a Leo Perez, a/k/a Joe Perez, age 29 of New Iberia, Louisiana, pled guilty in December 2008 to one felony count of continuing criminal enterprise.

BASALDUA was sentenced to life imprisonment.

BOUNTHONG XAPHILOM, a/k/a Nick, age 38, of Hofton City, Texas, was found guilty by a federal jury in January 2009 for one felony count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute crystal methamphetamine.

XAPHILOM was sentenced to 210 months (17.5 years) imprisonment and a term of five (5) years supervised release following confinement.

ISRAEL PEREZ, age 26, of New Iberia, Louisiana, pled guilty in December 2008 to one felony count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute crystal methamphetamine. PEREZ is "safety valve" eligible.**

PEREZ was sentenced to 48 months (4 years) imprisonment and four (4) years supervised release following confinement.

DUC HUU PHAM, age 34, of Los Angeles, California, was found guilty by a federal jury in January 2009 for one felony count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute crystal methamphetamine and two felony counts of using a communication facility, that is, a telephone, to further the methamphetamine distribution business.

PHAM was sentenced to 144 months (12 years) imprisonment and five (5) years supervised release following confinement.

ENG CHAMPKUNGSING, age 29, of Broussard, Louisiana, pled guilty in January 2009 to one felony count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute crystal methamphetamine. CHAMPKUNGSING is "safety valve" eligible.**

CHAMPKUNGSING was sentenced to 36 months (3 years) imprisonment and five (5) years supervised release following confinement.

PHANUT PHONCHINDA, a/k/a Peanut, age 26, of New Iberia, Louisiana, pled guilty in December 2008 to a one-count Bill of Information for possession with intent to distribute crystal methamphetamine.

PHONCHINDA was sentenced to 36 months (3 years) imprisonment and five (5) years supervised release following confinement.

TRAVIS JOSEPH, age 25, of New Iberia, Louisiana, pled guilty in January 2009 to a one-count Bill of Information for unlawful use of communication facility.

JOSEPH was sentenced to the maximum sentence of 48 months (4 years) imprisonment and one (1) year supervised release following confinement.

CHRISTOPHER AUCOIN, age 32, of New Iberia, Louisiana, was found guilty by a federal jury in January 2009 for one felony count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute crystal methamphetamine.

AUCOIN was sentenced to 120 months (10 years) imprisonment and five (5) years supervised release following confinement.

MISAY CHANDAKHAM, age 33, of Broussard, Louisiana, was found guilty by a federal jury in January 2009 for one felony count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute crystal methamphetamine.

CHANDAKHAM was sentenced to 120 months (10 years) imprisonment and five (5) years supervised release following confinement.

SAMUEL THIBODEAUX, age 33, of Jeanerette, Louisiana, pled guilty in December 2008 to a one-count Bill of Information for possession of a stolen vehicle.

THIBODEAUX was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment and three (3) years supervised release following confinement.

**Under federal law, the mandatory minimum for conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of methamphetamine is ten years. However, a judge may go below the mandatory minimum if the person qualifies under federal law for the “safety valve,” that is they have no criminal record and have cooperated with the government.

The South Central Louisiana Safe Streets Gang Task Force is comprised of agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office, Iberia Parish Sheriff's Office, St. Mary Parish Sheriff's Office, St. Landry Parish Sheriff's Office, Lafayette Police Department and Morgan City Police Department.

United States Attorney Donald W. Washington stated: "Reducing the supply of illegal drugs to this community remains a priority of this office. As drug traffickers like the Cuatro Flats Gang have become more sophisticated, so have federal, state, and local law enforcement organizations. We pledge to use every tool of the 21st century available to continue aggressive investigations and prosecute these drug trafficking organizations."

Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's New Orleans Division, David Welker, stated: "This investigation demonstrates the positive results that come from various law enforcement agencies cooperating, sharing information, combining resources and working together toward the common goal of arresting drug traffickers in order to keep our streets safe."

Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. United States Sentencing Guidelines established by the United States Congress and the United States Sentencing Commission are only used as guidelines by the judge in determining the appropriate sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

This case was investigated by many members of the task force with lead investigators Shane Landry of the Iberia Parish Sheriff's Office and Special Agent Doug Carr of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in addition to the assistance of the Louisiana State Police and the St. Martin Parish Sheriff's Office. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys James T. McManus and Myers P. Namie.

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