

NEWS RELEASE



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SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney
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For Immediate Release

**OPERATION MONEY TRAIN RESULTS IN SIX FEDERAL INDICTMENTS
CHARGING 35 MEMBERS OF MEXICAN DRUG-TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS**

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - October 8, 2008

San Diego, CA - Thirty-five individuals have been charged in six separate federal indictments involving six illegal narcotics and money distribution cells operating throughout Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico and Calexico, California, United States Attorney Karen P. Hewitt announced today. The six indictments were unsealed today in the Southern District of California following the arrests of 19 of the defendants; 16 of the defendants remain at large. The 35 defendants are all alleged to be members of Mexican drug-trafficking organizations operating in Imperial County, California, and they have been charged with narcotics and money-laundering violations.

The indictments were the result of an 18-month investigation, named “Operation Money Train,” that targeted international cocaine and methamphetamine distribution cells that were allegedly responsible for smuggling into the United States large-scale quantities of cocaine and methamphetamine from Mexico. According to the indictments, once these drugs were imported and delivered to various domestic-based distribution cells, the transportation cells returned millions of dollars in narcotics proceeds, in the form of bulk currency, to Mexico via hidden non-factory compartments built into passenger vehicles.

According to documents unsealed today in federal court, the six drug and money transportation cells, termed the “Ma/Rodriguez” Cell, “Verdugo” Cell, “Baez/Flores” Cell, “Banuelos” Cell, “Tizoc” Cell, and the “Gamez” Cell, are alleged to be responsible for importing cocaine and methamphetamine from Mexico and then transporting the narcotics to other domestic-based traffickers for distribution throughout the United States. The primary source for the narcotics was the Sinaloa Cartel, based primarily in Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico and Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. The investigation resulted in the disruption and seizure of more than \$9.5 million dollars in bulk cash that had been destined to be returned to drug-trafficking organizations in Mexico.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Kaplan, who is prosecuting the case, Sergio Figueroa (from the Rodriguez/Ma Cell), Juan Ramon Banuelos-Gonzalez (from the Banuelos Cell), Arturo Duran-Aguilar, Mario Ponce Moreno, Jaime Verdugo-Lutt, and Heraclio Verdugo-Lutt (from the Verdugo Cell) were each charged with engaging in a Continuing Criminal Enterprise (CCE), in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 848(a). The charge carries a minimum mandatory term of 20 years in prison and a maximum penalty of life in prison. The remaining 29 defendants face charges that carry a minimum mandatory term of 10 years in prison and a maximum of life in prison.

Operation Money Train was investigated and prosecuted as part of the U.S. Department of Justice’s Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force (“OCDETF”) program, which was created to consolidate

and utilize all law enforcement resources in the nation's efforts to dismantle major drug-trafficking organizations.

United States Attorney Hewitt said, "Operation Money Train is significant because it resulted in not only the seizure of large quantities of illegal narcotics destined for distribution throughout the United States, but it also included some of the largest-ever bulk cash seizures on record in the Southern District of California. The United States currency seized as part of this investigation represents illicit profits of the drug trade that will not reach the hands of drug-trafficking organizations in Mexico."

Operation Money Train was the result of a coalition of investigative agencies spearheaded by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), located in San Diego and Imperial, California. In particular, United States Attorney Hewitt praised the investigative efforts of the DEA's Imperial County Office, the El Centro Police Department, and the Imperial County Sheriff's Department for their outstanding work in this investigation and resulting prosecutions. U.S. Attorney Hewitt also noted with appreciation the logistical and operational support provided by the Calexico Police Department, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, United States Border Patrol, Customs and Border Protection, the Brawley Police Department, and the California Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement.

DEA Special Agent in Charge Ralph W. Partridge said, "OPERATION MONEY TRAIN focused on the immobilization of six drug transportation cells responsible for the importation of cocaine and methamphetamine into the United States from the Republic of Mexico. Additionally, this investigation focused on halting the repatriation of those illicit proceeds back to the sources of supply. The arrest of these drug trafficking organization members, the seizure of their drugs, and the seizure of the organization's profit has dealt a damaging blow to this DTO."

The defendants are scheduled to be in arraigned in federal court in El Centro on October 9, 2008, before United States Magistrate Judge Peter C. Lewis.

DEFENDANT

Case Number: 08cr3373H

Ruben Gamez-Martinez

aka Pelon, aka Gordo

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Conspiracy to Import Controlled Substances, Title 21, U.S.C., Secs. 952, 960 and 963

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Conspiracy to Distribute Controlled Substances, Title 21, U.S.C. Secs. 846 and 841(a)(1)

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Conspiracy to Launder Monetary Instruments, Title 18, U.S.C., Sec. 1956(h)

Maximum Penalties: Enhanced sentence; Forfeiture

Importation of a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C. Secs. 952 and 960

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Distribution of a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 841(a)(1)

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Criminal Forfeiture, Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 853 and Title 18, U.S.C., Sec. 982

DEFENDANTS

Case Number: 08cr3371BEN

Jose Guadalupe Beltran-Astorga

aka Lupillo

Fugitive

Oscar Abelino Meza-Gamboa

aka Flash

Fugitive

Carlos de Jesus Rodriguez-Salcido

aka Chompis

Alejandro Valentin Ma-Arce

aka Chino

Sergio Figueroa

aka Calitron, Cubano

Fernando Reynoso, Jr.

aka Junior

Fugitive

Luis Alfonso Janes

Joseph Milford Flores

aka Porkchop

Ricardo Pimentel-Quintero

Ricardo Dominguez-Martinez

Jose de Jesus Ruiz-Ramos

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Conspiracy to Import Controlled Substances, Title 21, U.S.C., Secs. 952, 960 and 963

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Conspiracy to Distribute Controlled Substances, Title 21, U.S.C. Secs. 846 and 841(a)(1)

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Importation of a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C. Secs. 952 and 960

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Continuing Criminal Enterprise, Title 18, U.S.C., Sec. 848(a)

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Distribution of a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 841(a)(1)

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Possession with Intent to Distribute a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 841(a)(1)

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Criminal Forfeiture; Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 853

DEFENDANTS

Case Number: 08cr3370W

Juan Ramon Banuelos-Gonzalez	aka el Doc, aka Doctor	
Walter Joven Banuelos-Gonzalez		
Elvia Samano	aka Mom	
Arturo Martinez-Cabrera	aka Negro	Fugitive
Jose Alfredo Quintero-Leon	aka Dientes, Dientitos	Fugitive
	aka Alonzo Domigues	
Jose Rochin-Soto	aka Rocha, aka la Roncha	Fugitive
Hilda Nomidel Escobar		

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Conspiracy to Import Controlled Substances, Title 21, U.S.C., Secs. 952, 960 and 963
 Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Conspiracy to Distribute Controlled Substances, Title 21, U.S.C. Secs. 846 and 841(a)(1)
 Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Continuing Criminal Enterprise, Title 18, U.S.C., Sec. 848(a)
 Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Conspiracy to Launder Monetary Instruments, Title 18, U.S.C., Sec. 1956(h)
 Maximum Penalties: Enhanced sentence; Forfeiture

Criminal Forfeiture, Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 853 and Title 18, U.S.C., Sec. 982

DEFENDANTS

Case Number: 08cr3372JLS

Arturo Duran-Aguilar	aka Turi	
Mario Ponce-Moreno	aka Capi	Fugitive
Jaime Eduardo Verdugo-Lutt	aka Leo	
Heraclio Verdugo-Lutt	aka Carlos, aka Cochi	Fugitive
Luis Enrique Verdugo-Lutt	aka Siete	
Francisco Javier Mora-Garcia	aka Betin, aka Beto, aka Orejon	Fugitive
Edgar Rogelio Gonzalez-Orozco	aka Roy Edgar	
	Gonzalez-Orozco	Fugitive
Allan Javier Bernal-Higareda		
Alfredo Gonzalez-Hernandez		Fugitive
Alex de Jesus Lopez		
Mario Camacho		Fugitive
Natalie Noel Mason		Fugitive

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Conspiracy to Import Controlled Substances, Title 21, U.S.C., Secs. 952, 960 and 963
 Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Conspiracy to Distribute Controlled Substances, Title 21, U.S.C. Secs. 846 and 841(a)(1)
 Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Continuing Criminal Enterprise, Title 18, U.S.C., Sec. 848(a)
 Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Importation of a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C. Secs. 952 and 960

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine
Distribution of a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 841(a)(1)

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine
Possession with Intent to Distribute a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 841(a)(1)

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine
Criminal Forfeiture, Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 853

DEFENDANTS

Case Number: 08cr3369L

Marco Antonio Baez-Torres aka Tony **Fugitive**
Armando Alberto Flores-Mirazo

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Conspiracy to Import Controlled Substances, Title 21, U.S.C., Secs. 952, 960 and 963

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Conspiracy to Distribute Controlled Substances, Title 21, U.S.C. Secs. 846 and 841(a)(1)

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Importation of a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C. Secs. 952 and 960

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Distribution of a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 841(a)(1)

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Criminal Forfeiture, Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 853

DEFENDANTS

Case Number: 08cr3374H

Espectacion Tizoc-Urias aka Lento **Fugitive**
Baudelio Tizoc-Ramirez **Fugitive**

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Conspiracy to Import a Controlled Substance, Title 21 U.S.C., Secs. 952, 960 and 963,

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine;

Conspiracy to Distribute a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C., Secs. 846 and 841(a)(1)

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Importation of a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C., Secs. 952 and 960

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Distribution of a Controlled Substance, Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 841(a)(1)

Maximum Penalties: Life Imprisonment; \$4,000,000.00 fine

Criminal Forfeiture, Title 21, U.S.C., Sec. 853

INVESTIGATING AGENCIES

Drug Enforcement Administration
El Centro Police Department
Imperial County District Attorney's Office
Imperial County Sheriff's Department
Calexico Police Department

Brawley Police Department
Imperial Police Department
California Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
U.S. Border Patrol
Customs and Border Protection

An indictment itself is not evidence that the defendants committed the crimes charged. The defendants are presumed innocent until the Government meets its burden in court of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.