



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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August 25, 2008

**MEXICAN NATIONAL FACES 14 YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON AFTER PLEADING GUILTY
TO FIREARMS SMUGGLING CHARGES**

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton announced that in San Antonio this afternoon, 44-year-old Ernesto Garza of Monterrey, Mexico, pleaded guilty to federal firearms charges related to a smuggling operation. Garza's plea agreement requires that he serve a 14-year federal prison term.

On August 11, 2008, a jury was picked to hear the case against Garza. Testimony was scheduled to begin today before United States District Judge Royal Furgeson. Opting out of a trial, Garza pleaded guilty to one count each of conspiracy to obtain firearms by making false statements and conspiracy to smuggle firearms into Mexico.

According to the factual basis filed in the case, Garza, a Mexican citizen, conspired to buy guns using "straw purchasers" and then smuggle the guns to Mexico. Because he was not entitled as a visa-holding Mexican citizen to buy guns in the United States, Garza paid people in the United States to buy the guns for him and then lie about who the guns were for. In June 2005, Garza first began trafficking primarily in hunting rifles. However, in 2006 and up to October 2007 when he was arrested, Garza trafficked in high-powered, high-capacity handguns and assault rifles such as the FN 57 caliber pistol and the FNH PS90 rifle. Garza was the organizer and leader in the conspiracy involving at least nine other individuals who were purchasing firearms on his behalf. At least 50 weapons were purchased as part of this ring and smuggled to Mexico. One of the FN 57 pistols was recovered in Mexico after being used in a running gun battle with Mexican soldiers where two Mexican soldiers were killed.

Garza has remained in federal custody since his arrest in October 2007. Sentencing is scheduled for November 5, 2008, at 2:00pm.

This case was investigated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the San Antonio Police Department. Assistant United States Attorney Mark Roomberg prosecuted this case on behalf of the government.

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