



U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
Eastern District of Wisconsin*

517 East Wisconsin Avenue

414 / 297-1700

Milwaukee, WI 53202

TTY 414 / 297-1088

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NEWS SUMMARY: Milwaukee Latin Kings Named as Racketeering Enterprise Engaged in Murder, Drug Trafficking, Arson, Kidnapping, and Other Violent Offenses; 49 Charged in Federal Court

The Milwaukee chapter of the Latin Kings street gang engaged in eight-year span of violent activity, including: murder, attempted murder, drug trafficking, robbery, kidnapping, arson, home invasions, drive-by shootings and intimidation of witnesses, according to an Indictment unsealed in federal court today.

Following a multi-year federal, state and local task force investigation, 49 members of the Latin Kings street gang were charged in federal court in Milwaukee with racketeering, drug and firearms offenses. Also today, federal, state and local law enforcement officers arrested numerous suspects and executed 15 federal search warrants in the Milwaukee area.

The 38 count indictment charges that the Latin Kings operated as a criminal RICO enterprise in Milwaukee and other parts of Wisconsin from January of 1998 through September 27, 2005, the date of the indictment. The indictment contains specific allegations regarding 4 murders and 38 attempted murders were committed by the defendants.

The indictment alleges that the Latin Kings had an established hierarchy, requiring the payment of membership and chapter dues paid from drug trafficking and robberies. The indictment alleges that members of group committed acts of violence against other street gangs to protect and defend Latin King territory and against members of the Latin Kings as punishment for violating gang rules. The indictment alleges that members of the gang distributed cocaine, crack cocaine and marijuana. If convicted, the defendants face up to life imprisonment on the racketeering charges and from 10 years to life on the drug trafficking conspiracy charge.

The specific murder allegations include the following:

- On or about February 10, 2002 - the murder of Jeffrey Becker
- On or about November 10, 2002 - the murder of Jorge Claudio
- On or about January 18, 2003 - the murder of Christian Ferrer
- On or about April 19, 2003 - the alleged murder of Kevin Hirschfield

In announcing the indictment today, United States Attorney Steven M. Biskupic stated that the charges and the arrests signify the commitment of federal, state and local law enforcement to aggressively attack gangs and gang crimes. "We intend to overwhelm this gang and others in the same way the gangs overwhelm Milwaukee neighborhoods."

Attorney General Alberto Gonzales has tasked each US Attorney with developing strategies to attack gangs and gang violence. In Milwaukee, state and federal prosecutors are working side by side with agents from the HIDTA, the FBI Safe Streets Initiative, the ATF Gun Task Force and the MPD Gang Unit to identify, investigate and prosecute the gangs and gang members most effecting the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

Biskupic added, "Cases of this dimension do not come together without a great deal of hard work by individual agents and prosecutors. I particularly want to recognize the excellent work of agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, officers with the Milwaukee Police Department, Assistant District Attorney David Robles of the Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office, and Mario Gonzales of the United States Attorney's Office."

"Cooperation among law enforcement agencies is the key to obliterating these gangs that terrorize our streets and neighborhoods. The Milwaukee Police Department is proud to stand with other law enforcement to announce that our streets are that much safer tonight," said Milwaukee Police Chief Nannette Hegerty.

This case was investigated by the HIDTA Gang Task Force, the Milwaukee Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Wisconsin Department of Justice - Division of Criminal Investigation, the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office, West Allis Police Department, Cudahy Police Department, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Lake Winnebago Drug Task Force and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The public is cautioned that an indictment is merely the formal method of returning charges against an individual and does not constitute inference of his or her guilt. An individual is presumed innocent until such time, if ever, that the government established his or her guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Mr. Biskupic noted that law enforcement in the Milwaukee area had brought other significant gang prosecutions over the past several years.

- In March of 2002, 18 members of the Ghetto Boys street gang were arrested on federal and state drug trafficking, firearms, arson, and kidnaping offenses arising out of an MPD and HIDTA gang investigation.
- In December of 2003 and continuing into February of 2004, 25 individuals associated with an Auer Street Boys drug trafficking ring were charged in federal court following a DEA and HIDTA gang investigation.

- In May of 2004, 35 individuals involved in a Spanish Cobra drug trafficking ring were arrested and prosecuted in state court following an MPD and HIDTA gang investigation.
- In the summer of 2004, 13 members of the Maniac Latin Disciples were charged in state court with drug and firearms offenses following an FBI and HIDTA gang investigation.
- In December of 2004, 29 individuals associated with the Cherry Street Mob were charged in federal court with drug trafficking and firearms violations following a Wisconsin Department of Justice, Division of Criminal Investigation, MPD and HIDTA gang investigation.
- In January and May of 2005, 21 members of the 2-6 Vice Lords were arrested on federal drug trafficking and firearms offenses following an FBI, MPD and HIDTA investigation.

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For more information call:

For more information contact:

Assistant United States Attorney Mario Gonzales
Public Affairs Liaison Francia Wendelborn