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**MS-13 TREASURER SENTENCED ON RICO CONSPIRACY CHARGES**

*Participated in Gang Rapes of Two High School Girls*

**Greenbelt**, Maryland - U.S. District Judge Deborah K. Chasanow sentenced Melvin Muriros-Garcia, also known as Strichar, age 20, of Hyattsville, Maryland, today to 188 months in prison, followed by five years of supervised release for conspiracy to conduct and participate in racketeering activities of MS-13 gang, announced United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein.

U.S. Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein said, "We will continue to coordinate our efforts and use all available tools to combat violent gangs that engage in such vicious and heartless crimes."

La Mara Salvatrucha, also known as the MS-13, is a gang composed primarily of immigrants or descendants of immigrants from El Salvador, with members operating throughout Prince George's County and Montgomery County, Maryland, and elsewhere. MS-13 is a national and international criminal organization with approximately 10,000 members.

According to his plea agreement, from 2001 to 2006, Muriros-Garcia paid dues to the gang and engaged in "tagging" (graffiti) to mark the territory purportedly under the control of MS-13. Muriros-Garcia became the gang's treasurer, collecting gang dues and relaying that money to gang leaders, including wire transfers to other gang members in Los Angeles, California.

On May 12, 2003, MS-13 gang members picked up two girls – ages 15 and 17 -- outside a local high school early that morning. The girls were taken to the home of an MS-13 member, where Muriros-Garcia and a number of MS-13 gang members were present. The girls were taken to separate bedrooms where they were held at gun point. One of the gang members held the first victim and choked her while telling her that she would have sex with all the gang members. Muriros-Garcia and the other MS-13 gang members lined up in a "train" and entered the bedrooms in five minute intervals, raping each girl. Each victim was raped by more than 10 gang members.

In the summer of 2003, Muriros-Garcia and other gang members robbed a marijuana

dealer at knife-point near a liquor store in Hyattsville, Maryland. An MS-13 member took approximately \$1,700 from the dealer and gave it to Muriros-Garcia, who maintained the money to assist jailed gang members and for other gang purposes.

In July 2005, Muriros-Garcia attended a gang meeting in which he and other MS-13 members decided that an MS-13 gang member named "Coco" would murder a rival gang member as punishment because Coco did not help in a fight in which two MS-13 gang members were stabbed. Ultimately, "Coco" did not murder the rival gang member.

Since 2005, the U.S. Attorney's Office has prosecuted a total of 42 MS-13 gang members, with 30 defendants charged in a RICO conspiracy case. Jose Hipolito Cruz Diaz, a/k/a "Pirana," Omar Vasquez, a/k/a "Duke," and Henry Zelaya, a/k/a "Homeboy," were convicted at trial by a federal jury on April 27, 2007, of the racketeering conspiracy and face a maximum sentence of life in prison. Edgar Alberto Ayala, a/k/a "Pony," and Oscar Ramos Velasquez, a/k/a "Casper," were convicted at trial by a federal jury in November 2006 of racketeering conspiracies. Ayala was sentenced on June 1, 2007, to 35 years in prison, and Velasquez faces a maximum sentence of life at his sentencing scheduled for July 23, 2007. Nine defendants, all of Maryland, have pleaded guilty, including: Walter Barahona, who was sentenced on April 16, 2007, to 14 years in prison; Franklin Mejia Molina, who was sentenced on Dec. 4, 2006, to more than nine years in prison; and Juan Lopez, who was sentenced on Oct. 16, 2006, to 87 months in prison. Jose Pena Aguilar was sentenced to 10 years in prison on Nov. 6, 2006, for using a firearm in furtherance of a racketeering conspiracy, to be served consecutive to a 20-year sentence received in the Circuit Court of Prince George's County for attempted murder.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein praised the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Prince George's County Police Department; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; the Montgomery County Police Department; the Howard County Police Department; the Maryland National Capital Park Police; the Maryland State Police and the Fairfax County, Virginia Police Department for their investigative work.

Mr. Rosenstein thanked Assistant U.S. Attorneys James Trusty and Chan Park, and Trial Attorney David Jaffe of the Department of Justice Gang Squad, who are prosecuting the case. Mr. Rosenstein also commended the State's Attorney's Office for Prince George's County for the cooperation provided by their office.