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**MS-13 LEADER SENTENCED TO 35 YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON FOR
PARTICIPATING IN A RACKETEERING CONSPIRACY AND RELATED CRIMES**

Greenbelt, Maryland - U.S. District Judge Deborah K. Chasanow sentenced Jose Hipolito Cruz Diaz, a/k/a "Pirana," age 28, of Lanham, Maryland to 35 years in prison, followed by five years of supervised release for conspiracy to participate in a racketeering enterprise involving murder, robbery, obstruction of justice, witness tampering and conspiracy to commit murder in aid of racketeering, announced United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein and Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division at the U.S. Department of Justice. The sentence was imposed late on August 10, 2007.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein said, "Jose Cruz Diaz will spend most of his life in federal prison as a result of his membership in the MS-13 gang. The RICO statute is a powerful tool that allows us to prosecute gang members in federal court for the activities of the criminal organization they chose to join."

A federal jury convicted Cruz Diaz and co-defendants Omar Vasquez, a/k/a "Duke," age 29; and Henry Zelaya, age 21, on April 27, 2007 after a seven week trial. According to trial testimony, the defendants were MS-13 leaders who conspired from at least 2001 to April 2006 to operate an MS-13 enterprise in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties through a pattern of racketeering activity which included five murders in Maryland and one in Virginia; the use of deadly weapons including firearms, baseball bats, machetes, bottles or knives in the commission of numerous murders, attempted murders and assaults; assaults on an MS-13 gang member from El Salvador, juvenile females and rival gang members; kidnaping, robbery, obstruction of justice and witness tampering.

Witnesses testified that Cruz Diaz was the leader of the Sailors Locos Salvatruchos Westside (SLSW) clique in Washington, D.C. Vasquez was sent from El Salvador to operate all the cliques in Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Northern Virginia. On January 21, 2005 Vasquez, Cruz Diaz and other MS-13 members drove to an apartment building in Fairfax, Virginia to look for rival gang members. Two MS-13 members shot at the crowd of youths sitting outside the building, murdering one and injuring two others.

Henry Zelaya was sentenced to life in prison on July 30, 2007. Judge Chasanow has

scheduled sentencing for Vasquez on September 24, 2007 at 2:00 p.m., when he faces a maximum sentence of life in prison for conspiracy to participate in a racketeering enterprise.

To date, this office has charged 42 gang members with federal offenses, including 30 defendants charged in this RICO conspiracy case. Fourteen MS-13 gang members have been convicted thus far in this RICO conspiracy case. Edgar Alberto Ayala, age 29, of Suitland, Maryland and Oscar Ramos Velasquez, age 22, of Baltimore, were convicted at trial by a federal jury in November 2006 of the racketeering conspiracy. Velasquez was sentenced on July 23, 2007 to 37 years in prison and Ayala was sentenced to 35 years in prison on June 1, 2007. Nine defendants, all of Maryland, have pleaded guilty.

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

Mr. Rosenstein thanked the Prince George's County State's Attorney Glenn F. Ivey, Montgomery County State's Attorney John McCarthy, and Fairfax County, Virginia, Commonwealth's Attorney Robert F. Horan, Jr., for the assistance that they and their offices provided.

Mr. Rosenstein commended Assistant U.S. Attorneys James Trusty and Chan Park, and Trial Attorney David Jaffe, a prosecutor for the Justice Department's Gang Squad, who are prosecuting the case.