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December 13, 2007

FEDERAL OFFICIALS ANNOUNCE THE INDICTMENT OF NINE INDIAN NATIONALS IN AN INTERNATIONAL ALIEN SMUGGLING CONSPIRACY

NEWS RELEASE

Martin C. Carlson, Acting United States Attorney for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, and John Kelleghan, Special Agent in Charge, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, announced today that nine Indian nationals have been indicted for their alleged roles in a far-reaching international alien smuggling ring.

According to Mr. Carlson and SAC Kelleghan, a federal grand jury has returned a three count indictment against nine persons— NARESH PATEL, DINESH DIWAN, RAKESH PATEL, HIREN MEHTA, RAJESH KATWA, JITENDRA SHETH, ASHA VERMA, BIBIN BALACHANDARAN, and SANDIPKUMAR PATEL—charging these defendants with conspiring to illegally smuggle undocumented aliens from India to Pennsylvania, transporting these aliens illegally through Bangkok, Thailand, Los Angeles and Philadelphia. The indictment returned by the grand jury alleged that this conspiracy extended from 2003 through December 5, 2007. According to the indictment, the conspirators were

paid tens of thousands of dollars per alien for smuggling these undocumented aliens into the United States. The indictment alleges that, as part of the conspiracy, the conspirators would attempt to obtain false passports and immigration documents. The conspirators would then arrange to transport these aliens from south east Asia into the United States. The indictment charges that the conspirators plotted to transport dozens of illegal aliens into the United States and actually transported a dozen aliens into this country, in violation of law, before they were arrested.

The indictment charges the defendants with conspiring to violate immigration laws, and with illegally transporting illegal aliens for private financial gain. If convicted of these offenses the defendants face penalties of up to 15 years in prison and fines totaling \$500,000. The indictment also calls for the forfeiture of \$69,318 seized from the defendants at the time of their arrests on December 5, 2007.

According to Mr. Carlson eight of the defendants-- NARESH PATEL, DINESH DIWAN, RAKESH PATEL, HIREN MEHTA, JITENDRA SHETH, ASHA VERMA, BIBIN BALACHANDARAN, and SANDIPKUMAR PATEL- were arrested in Pennsylvania and Chicago, Illinois, on December 5, following carefully coordinated raids by agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. All of these defendants currently remain in federal custody pending further proceedings in this case. One defendant-RAJESH KATWA- remains at large.

In announcing these charges, Mr. Carlson praised the exceptional work of Immigration

and Customs Enforcement agents, stating: “Our nation is a nation of immigrants, and this country is built on the promise of liberty for all who obey the laws, including our immigration laws. However, when individuals attempt to take this Nation’s promise of liberty, and try to turn that liberty into a license to illegally smuggle undocumented aliens into this Country, the men and women of Immigration and Customs Enforcement stay ready to aggressively enforce our laws. Those who play by the rules and enter this country lawfully should expect no less than fair, even-handed enforcement of the immigration laws against persons who would cheat in order to gain entry into this Country. Today’s indictment sends a powerful, yet simple, message: Those who enter this Nation legally are welcomed to share in our Country’s promise of liberty; those who violate the law must be prepared to face the consequences of those violations of the law.”

SAC Kelleghan said “Today’s indictment stems from exceptional collaborative efforts among our law enforcement partners both domestically and internationally. These individuals are no different than those involved in the smuggling of any contraband across our nation’s borders; their greed for financial gain led to the results announced today. ICE is committed to ensuring our country is safe from those individuals who believe they can smuggle individuals into the U.S. unimpeded. I specifically want to thank Acting U.S. Attorney Marty Carlson and his staff along with the Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives SAC Baltimore for their tremendous support with this investigation.”

An Indictment or Information is not evidence of guilt but simply a description of the charge made by the Grand Jury and/or United States Attorney against a defendant. A charged Defendant is presumed innocent until a jury returns a unanimous finding that the United States has proven the defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt or until the defendant has pled guilty to the charges.