



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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District of Arizona*

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## **CHANDLER WOMAN SENTENCED TO 18 MONTHS IN FEDERAL PRISON FOR CHILD SMUGGLING**

TUCSON, Ariz. – Leeann Ortiz, 28, of Chandler, Ariz., was sentenced here today to 18 months in prison by U.S. District Court Chief Judge John M. Roll for attempting to smuggle three young children into the United States. Ortiz pleaded guilty on March 20, 2008 to Conspiracy to Transport Illegal Aliens for Profit.

Ortiz attempted to enter the U.S. on January 18, 2007, at the Nogales, Ariz. Port of Entry accompanied by her mother/co-defendant Otelia Villarreal Larios and three minor children, two boys ages 6 and 7 and a 11-year-old girl. Ortiz told the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) official that the children were hers and presented her own children's birth certificates, social security cards and other documents on their behalf. Larios told the CBP official that she was the children's grandmother.

The CBP official became suspicious and referred them for further inspection. During questioning, the three children gave their true names and stated that they were on their way to Phoenix to join their father and an older brother, both of whom have been residing there illegally for some time. The children added that their mother and another sister were still at a motel in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, where Ortiz had picked them up earlier that day and instructed them to use different names when crossing into the U.S.

On February 14, 2007, both Ortiz and Larios were charged in federal court in Tucson, with Conspiracy to Transport Illegal Aliens for Financial Gain and other federal alien smuggling charges. Larios pleaded guilty to the conspiracy charge on February 26, 2008, and is pending sentencing on July 10, 2008, for her part in the offense.

The smuggled children were turned over to the custody of the Mexican Consulate who then turned them over to the Mexican Department of Family Services (the Mexican equivalent of U.S. Child Protective Services.) The children have since been reunited with their family.

The investigation in this case was conducted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The prosecution was handled by Shelley K. Clemens, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Tucson.

CASE NUMBER: CR-07-00286-TUC-JMR  
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