



U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
Northern District of Mississippi*

*The Ethridge Professional Building
900 Jefferson Avenue
Oxford, Mississippi 38655-3608*

*662/234-3351
FAX CRIMINAL DIVISION 662/234-0657*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Oxford, Mississippi
February 28, 2007

UNITED STATES CHARGES 19 WITH GUN TRAFFICKING IN MISSISSIPPI AND CHICAGO

OXFORD, Miss. – Federal officials announced today the arrest of some 19 defendants in Mississippi and Chicago, Illinois, who are charged with trafficking firearms from Mississippi to Chicago and putting them in the hands of gang members and convicted felons. The defendants were arrested by federal, state, and local agents this morning in Northern Mississippi and Chicago. The arrests were part of Project Safe Neighborhoods, a nationwide initiative to combat violent gun crime.

A complaint unsealed in Chicago alleges that the charged defendants conspired to illegally purchase firearms in pawn shops and gun stores in Clarksdale and Tunica, Mississippi area, transport the firearms to Chicago, and distribute the firearms to members of Chicago street gangs. The members of the conspiracy are alleged to have transported in excess of 100 firearms from Mississippi to Chicago, Illinois, between August 1999 and April 2005. Some of those illegally purchased guns later were recovered at crime scenes, according to the complaint.

The affidavit in support of the Chicago complaint describes an organizational structure in which firearms “brokers” from Chicago arranged to have guns purchased in Mississippi and brought to Illinois for distribution to gang members in and around Chicago. The brokers allegedly worked with “traffickers” who recruited “straw purchasers” to buy the guns at three

different pawn shops and a gun shop in Mississippi. The traffickers then transported the guns to Chicago where they were distributed at the direction of the brokers.

According to the complaint, the straw purchasers falsely certified on federal forms that they were the actual purchasers of firearms, when, in fact, they knew the firearms were being purchased on behalf of co-conspirators who intended to transport them to Chicago. The complaint further alleges that in many cases, the straw purchasers knew that the firearms were to be sold to members of various Chicago street gangs and were to be used for illegal purposes. In an effort to avoid detection by law enforcement, members of the conspiracy obliterated the serial numbers from many of the firearms. According to the complaint, a number of the defendants involved in the conspiracy as brokers and traffickers are convicted felons, and thus cannot legally possess a firearm.

According to the complaint, personnel from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) analyzed gun tracing data from firearms recovered by law enforcement in the Northern District of Illinois between January 2001 and October 2006, and discovered that a total of 301 guns came from four federally licensed firearms dealers in the Clarksdale and Tunica areas. Investigators used records from those dealers to identify the purchasers of those guns, who were interviewed as part of the investigation. The 14 defendants alleged in the complaint allegedly were responsible for acquiring and transporting to Chicago at least 39 of the guns ultimately recovered by law enforcement, and for illegally purchasing, transporting to Chicago, and distributing a total of more than 100 guns, most of which have not been recovered.

The complaint describes the circumstances under which certain of the guns were recovered in Chicago, including in connection with investigations of shootings and drug

transactions. According to the complaint, one gun allegedly purchased as part of the conspiracy, a 9mm semi-automatic pistol, was recovered in Chicago in December 2003, approximately 10 months after its purchase in Mississippi, following an incident in which police officers responding to a tip that individuals in a stolen car were on their way to commit a homicide, found the car and were confronted by two persons pointing guns at them. The police officers opened fire, killing the men, and one of the police officers suffered a gunshot wound to his hand.

Five of the nineteen defendants have been indicted by a federal grand jury in the Northern District of Mississippi, under the direction of United States Attorney Jim M. Greenlee and ATF Special Agent in Charge David Harper of the New Orleans Field Division. Each of the five defendants is charged with one or more counts of making false statements in connection with the purchase of firearms, by falsely claiming to be the actual purchaser. Those defendants include: **Clifford Moore** , 26, Friars Point, MS; **Latoria Davis**, 26, Clarksdale, MS; **Jeannie Mae Bedford**, 36, Jonestown, MS; **Veronica Gilliam** , 27, Jonestown MS; and **George Gilliam**, 25, Jonestown, MS. These defendants will be prosecuted in the Northern District of Mississippi.

Fourteen other defendants were charged in the federal complaint unsealed today in the Northern District of Illinois. Charged in the Chicago complaint are: **Roy Christopher Brunt**, 29, **Sylvester Rice**, 29, **Demetrius Burnett**, 33, **Percy Mattox**, 33, **McKinley Pitts**, 29, **Charles Cotton**, 46, **Percy Strong**, 54, **Arness Brunt**, 26, **Tammie Brown**, 30, and **Curtis Simmons**, 25, all of Jonestown, MS; **James Jiles** , 26, of Clarksdale, MS; and **Eddie Nesby**, 25; **Julius Statham**, 37; and **Antonio Brunt**, 30, all of Chicago IL;

The investigation was conducted jointly by the Chicago Police Department, the Illinois

State Police, and the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco Firearms and Explosives. Agents from the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics and Deputy U.S. Marshals also assisted ATF with today's arrests.

The government is being represented by Assistant United States Attorney Ronald DeWald in the Northern District of Illinois and Assistant United States Attorney Susan Bradley in the Northern District of Mississippi. If convicted, each defendant charged in the Chicago complaint faces a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment and \$250,000 fine, and each defendant charged in Mississippi faces a maximum penalty of ten years' imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine for each count charged. The Court, however, would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed. All of the defendants arrested in Mississippi are scheduled for an initial appearance today in U.S. District Court in Oxford, Mississippi.

The public is reminded that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The multiple defendants in this case are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial at which the United States has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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Read the related Chicago Press Release.