



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

**REMARKS DELIVERED BY
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**U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

LOS ANGELES FUGITIVE OPERATIONS PRESS CONFERENCE

**Wednesday, October 3, 2007
Los Angeles, CA**

Good morning. Thank you all for joining us today. Before we begin, I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce some of the people who have made today's announcement possible. John Torres is with us, and he is ICE's Director of Detention and Removal Operations. We're also joined by Jim Hayes, field office director for ICE detention and removal operations here in Los Angeles.

Next to Jim is Curtis Kin, representing the United States Attorney's Office in Los Angeles. Curtis is the chief of the U.S. Attorney's Domestic Security and Immigration Crime Section.

I also want to recognize the men and women standing behind me. They are just a few of the immigration agents and officers who took part in the record-setting enforcement operation we are announcing this morning. Thank you all for your extraordinary efforts.

Yesterday, the ICE office of detention and removal in Los Angeles wrapped up a two-week operation that ranks among the largest immigration enforcement actions ICE has ever undertaken.

The operation targeted criminal aliens and immigration fugitives in the greater Los Angeles area. Immigration fugitives are aliens who have been ordered by an immigration judge to leave the country, but have refused to do so.

In total, ICE officers took more than 1,300 persons into custody, representing 32 different countries including Mexico, Honduras, Ireland, and Russia. That figure includes more than 530 criminal aliens and immigration fugitives who were at large in five counties here in the Southland. It also includes approximately 800 previously unidentified criminal aliens who were incarcerated in area jails and have now been turned over to ICE. 90% of the aliens arrested were either criminal aliens, or immigration fugitives, or both. And 600 of them have already been removed from the country.

These arrests included some very dangerous aliens, including aliens with ties to violent street gangs, as well prior convictions for drug trafficking, domestic violence, and sex offenses. You can see some case examples displayed on the posters throughout the room.

And finding them was hard work. Most of the aliens we're looking for know they're being sought and they go to considerable lengths to elude the law. Our officers have found their targets hiding in clothes dryers, in attic crawl spaces, and even in bags of laundry.

In those instances where the alien we arrested has both a criminal history and a record of past deportations, we won't hesitate to pursue the filing of appropriate federal charges. The U.S. Attorney's Office in Los Angeles is working closely with ICE to target these kinds of cases for felony prosecution. I'll let Curtis discuss that in more detail shortly.

Today's success is a direct result of the hard work of our fugitive Operations and CAP teams, who seek to reduce the fugitive population and keep criminal aliens off the streets of our communities.

We began the Fugitive Operations Team initiative in 2003 as a way to significantly expand upon our efforts to identify, track down and arrest fugitive aliens and see that their final orders of deportation are properly executed. Too often, these orders were simply ignored and aliens instructed to leave the country would slip quietly into the shadows of society. As of last week, we now have 75 fugitive operations teams including 5 in Los Angeles and a total of 12 in California.

We have also created a new center, the Fugitive Operation Support Center. The Center assists our fugitive operations teams by gathering and analyzing file information and electronic data on fugitive cases across the country. Since its inception, the Center has disseminated more than 150,000 case leads to our fugitive operations teams in the field.

And we are allowing fewer fugitives to begin with by detaining those who pose a risk of flight.

Earlier this year, statistical data confirmed that our hard work was paying off when it was reported that the nation's fugitive alien population showed its first-ever decline. Estimates now place the number of alien absconders at approximately 595,000, representing a decrease of more than 36,000 from October 2006.

Our data also indicate that during the last year, and for the first time since the program's inception, the number of arrests made by ICE fugitive operations officers eclipsed the 30,000 mark for a single year, more than doubling the prior year's total.

In addition to the fugitive aliens arrested over the course of this operational surge, we also focused on increasing the efforts of our Criminal Alien Program, an initiative designed to identify illegal aliens currently incarcerated at area jails.

And for every one of those criminals we're able to remove directly from our jails, there is one less fugitive alien escaping to the interior of the country.

Of course, ICE's fugitive operations program is just one facet of our comprehensive internal enforcement strategy.

Today's action sends a clear message that we are no longer allowing illegal aliens in this country to willfully ignore immigration judges' orders. The United States of America has always welcomed law-abiding immigrants, but foreign nationals who violate our laws and commit crimes against our citizens should be on notice that ICE is going to use all of the tools at its disposal to find you and send you back home.

The United States Attorney's Office here in Los Angeles has been an important ally in ICE's efforts. Curtis, why don't you update everyone on your program?

Thank you all again for joining us here today, and at this time I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.