



Department of Justice

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12/18/08

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KEY MEMBER OF ALLEGED HUMAN TRAFFICKING RING PLEADS GUILTY TO SEX TRAFFICKING CHARGES

At Least 10 Victims, Including Several Minors, Were Forced Into Prostitution in Metro Atlanta

Atlanta, GA - FRANCISCO CORTES-MEZA, 25, a/k/a "Paco," of Mexico, pleaded guilty today in federal district court to sex trafficking offenses involving young Mexican women.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias said of the pleas, "Human trafficking violates basic human rights and will not be tolerated. Compelling women by force, fraud or coercion, or girls under the age of 18, to engage in commercial sex acts is a serious violation of federal law. The victimization of the young women in this case was unfortunately made easier by their illegal status, unfamiliarity with U.S. laws, and fear of law enforcement instilled in them by the traffickers. Federal laws protect all victims of such heinous crimes, whether or not they are United States citizens. No victim should fear coming forward to report illegal activity and criminal abuse."

In Washington, D.C., Grace Chung Becker, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division, United States Department of Justice, said, "This defendant committed morally reprehensible crimes by forcing and coercing young women to engage in prostitution and placing a teenager into prostitution. I commend the federal agents and prosecutors for recognizing the importance of this human trafficking case and ensuring that justice will be done."

"These traffickers are luring young vulnerable women with the promise of prosperity and a better life," said Kenneth A Smith, ICE Special Agent in Charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Atlanta. "We will continue working with our DOJ partners to hold traffickers accountable for their vile and unconscionable crimes."

According to the information presented in court, during winter 2007, FRANCISCO CORTES-MEZA met a 22-year-old Mexican national in Mexico, began a relationship with her, and eventually persuaded her to come with him to the United States

under the false pretense that she would find a job in a restaurant, all the while knowing that the victim would be caused to work in prostitution when she reached the Atlanta area. FRANCISCO CORTES-MEZA smuggled the victim into the United States and transported her to a house in Norcross, Ga. A few days after her arrival in Norcross FRANCISCO CORTES-MEZA informed the victim that she would be required to engage in prostitution to make money. The victim was then required to provide him with the money that she was paid for commercial sex. FRANCISCO CORTES-MEZA controlled the victim's daily life and did not allow her to go places without his permission. When the victim stated that she did not wish to engage in prostitution, he became angry with her and physically assaulted her.

FRANCISCO CORTES-MEZA pleaded guilty to sex trafficking by force and coercion. This offense carries a mandatory minimum sentence of fifteen years in federal prison. In determining the actual sentence, the Court will consider the United States Sentencing Guidelines, which are not binding but provide appropriate sentencing ranges for most offenders. A sentencing date for FRANCISCO CORTES-MEZA, before U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story, has not yet been set.

CORTES-MEZA's brother, an alleged co-conspirator, RAUL CORTES-MEZA, 21, a/k/a "Oscar," of Mexico, awaits trial on related and similar charges. No trial date has yet been set for RAUL CORTES-MEZA.

The prosecution of human trafficking offenses is a top priority of the Justice Department. In the last seven fiscal years, the Civil Rights Division, in conjunction with the U.S. Attorneys' Offices, has increased by nearly seven-fold the number of human trafficking cases filed in court as compared to the previous seven fiscal years. In fiscal year 2007, the Department obtained a record number of convictions in human trafficking prosecutions.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Assistant United States Attorney Corey Steinberg and DOJ Civil Rights Attorney Karima Maloney are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias (pronounced NAH-me-us), United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan.