

United States Department of Justice

For Immediate Release

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Southern District of California

Southern District of California Charges 28 Defendants with Drug Trafficking, Money Laundering, and Firearms Offenses Relating to Nationwide Operation Entitled “Project Deliverance”

SAN DIEGO, CA—United States Attorney Laura E. Duffy today announced the unsealing of three indictments and four complaints charging 28 individuals with various drug trafficking, money laundering, and firearms offenses. The charges relate to a nationwide operation entitled “Project Deliverance.” Individuals named in the cases are charged with a variety of crimes, including: conspiracy to import into the United States and distribution of methamphetamine and cocaine, money laundering, bulk cash smuggling, and firearms violations. This coordinated takedown is part of the Department of Justice’s Southwest Border Strategy, announced in March 2009, which uses federal prosecutor-led task forces bringing together federal, state and local law enforcement components to identify, disrupt and dismantle the Mexican drug cartels through investigation, prosecution and extradition of their key leaders and facilitators, and seizure and forfeiture of their assets. Through this continued joint cooperation, the Department is actively working to stem the flow of illegal narcotics, weapons, and bulk cash moving across the U.S./Mexico border.

The investigations in the Southern District of California include: “Operation Burrito Grande” and “Operation Imperial Strikes Back,” both Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) cases, and one separate federal firearms case. The OCDETF program was created to consolidate and utilize all law enforcement resources in this country’s battle against major drug trafficking.

In Operation Burrito Grande, three indictments charging fourteen (14) defendants in separate but related drug trafficking conspiracies were unsealed. The investigation focused on several transportation and distribution cells in Calexico, California with ties to certain Mexican drug trafficking organizations. As set forth in the indictments, the defendants engaged in separate conspiracies to possess and distribute methamphetamine. The indictments allege that Manuel Beltran-Torrecillas and “Marcos LNU” ran several narcotics trafficking transportation cells throughout Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico and the Imperial Valley. The indictments further allege that Beltran-Torrecillas, Gilberto Romero-Figueroa, and others transported methamphetamine and cocaine through Calexico Ports of Entry (POE) into San Diego and Orange counties.

In Operation Imperial Strikes Back, three criminal complaints were unsealed that charge thirteen (13) members of a cross-border network with federal drug, money laundering, and bulk cash smuggling offenses. The first of the three complaints charges 11 defendants

with conspiracy to import methamphetamine and conspiracy to launder monetary instruments. The complaint alleges that the defendants engaged in the transportation of multi-kilogram quantities of methamphetamine from Mexico to the greater Los Angeles area. The complaint also sets out a broad conspiracy to remit drug proceeds from the United States to Mexico. According to the complaint, agents seized approximately \$1.9 million during the course of the investigation. The second complaint charges one defendant with attempting to smuggle bulk cash from the United States into Mexico. The third complaint charges one defendant with conspiracy to import cocaine.

In a separate case, Ayman Ghaly, a former Customs and Border Protection Agricultural Inspector at the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa Ports of Entry, was charged in a 56-count complaint with multiple firearms violations. The complaint charges Ghaly with making false statements to federal firearms licensees in San Diego County in the course of purchasing seventy-two firearms. Ghaly is further charged with one count of dealing firearms without a license. According to the complaint, Ghaly purchased 82 firearms from three federal firearms licensees in San Diego County between September 2004 and September 2006. All but two of the firearms were handguns. Ghaly then unlawfully sold most of these firearms to individuals in Arizona and Mexico, including an individual claiming to be a Mexican official. The complaint further alleges that two of these firearms have since been recovered by police in Mexico, one within eleven months of Ghaly's purchase. Ghaly made his initial appearance in the Eastern District of New York on June 9, 2010; he is expected to be transferred to San Diego in the coming weeks.

United States Attorney Duffy said, "The United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of California will vigorously investigate transnational criminal activity and prosecute individuals involved in it. Today's complaints and indictments reflect this office's unwavering commitment to combat the threat posed by drug traffickers and their organizations. We are going to fight drug trafficking on every level—from load drivers to leaders. If today a leader is out of reach, then through charges like those filed during this operation, we will seek to dismantle the workforce below whose experience and knowledge facilitate daily operations."

"The culmination of these investigations shows that the DEA and its law enforcement partners will continue to attack drug trafficking organizations at every level," said San Diego Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Special-Agent-In-Charge Ralph W. Partridge. "Today, we have put a huge dent in the business of the people who facilitate the transportation and distribution of drugs into the United States and are a direct threat to our communities here in San Diego and Imperial Counties."

"Violent drug distribution networks along the Southwest Border pose a threat to our border security and thus a threat to our nation's citizens. By combining resources through operations like Project Deliverance, the law enforcement community will continue to disrupt and dismantle drug distribution networks and put those involved in the transportation of these drugs behind bars," said Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Assistant Director Kevin L. Perkins.

"The arrest and enforcement action by ATF in this investigation proved successful in cutting off an alleged supplier of illegal firearms to Mexico," said John A. Torres, Special-Agent-In-Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) Los Angeles Field Division.

“This investigation highlights the fact that tracing and registering firearms aids in combating illegal trafficking of firearms. ATF will continue to utilize our expertise in conducting firearms trafficking investigations nationally and internationally. ATF will trace each firearm seized or recovered to determine if anyone else is facilitating illegal firearm transactions. It is our goal to eliminate the suppliers of firearms to the cartels.”

OPERATION BURRITO GRANDE

Operation Burrito Grande was investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration, with the assistance of the Imperial County District Attorney’s Office, the El Centro Police Department, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Pomona Police Department, the LA IMPACT, and the California Highway Patrol and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Stewart Young.

DEFENDANTS

United States v. Manuel Beltran-Torrecillas, et. al. (Case Number 10cr2154BTM)
Manuel Beltran-Torrecillas Gilberto Romero-Figueroa Jose Longoria Rodriguez Felipe Rangel
Esperanza Gastelo David Martinez-Rodriguez Richard Ralph Valles
United States v. Jorge Luis Martinez-Valdez, et. al. (Case Number 10cr2156BTM)
Oscar Alberto Espinoza Daniel Acosta Ventura Jorge Luis Martinez-Valdez
United States v. Jose Alberto Martinez, et. al. (Case Number 10cr1057BTM)
Sergio Ismael Villa-Montano Adriana Gomez-Martinez Yovani Medrano Gumecindo Medrano

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Title 21, United States Code, Section 952, 960 & 963—Conspiracy to Import a Controlled Substance
Title 21, United States Code, Section 846 & 841(a)(1)—Conspiracy to Distribute a Controlled Substance
Title 21, United States Code, Section 952 & 960—Importation of a Controlled Substance
Title 21, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1)—Distribution of a Controlled Substance

OPERATION IMPERIAL STRIKES BACK

These cases were investigated jointly by the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with the assistance of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Imperial County Sheriff’s Office, the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Office, and the California Highway Patrol, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Peter Mazza.

DEFENDANTS

United States v. Salvador Aguirre-Beltran, et. al. (Case Number 10MJ1723)
Salvador Aguirre-Beltran Valentin Rodriguez-Beltran Salvador Aguirre-Lopez
Humberto Barraza Sixto Navarette Ezequiel Solis, Jr. Jesus Vasquez Dalia Zitlaly Cardenas Raul
Francisco Navarro Francisco Jesus Garcia Juan Garcia
United States v. Iram Navarro (Case Number 10MJ1722) Iram Navarro

United States v. Fabian Madueno (Case Number 10MJ8682) Fabian Madueno

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

United States v. Salvador Aguirre-Beltran, et. al. (Case Number 10MJ1723)

Title 21, United States Code, Section 952,960, 963—Conspiracy to Import Methamphetamine

Title 18, United States Code, Section 1956(h)—Conspiracy to Launder Monetary Instruments

Title 18, United States Code, Sections 982(a)(1) and (b)—Criminal Forfeiture

United States v. Iram Navarro (Case Number 10MJ1722)

Title 31, United States Code, Section 5332(a) – Bulk Cash Smuggling

United States v. Fabian Madueno (Case Number 10MJ8682)

Title 21, United States Code, Sections 952, 960 963—Conspiracy to Import Cocaine

FIREARMS CASE

The case was investigated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives and prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Aaron Clark.

DEFENDANT Case No. 10mj1843

Ayman Nabil Ghaly

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(a)(6) and 924(a)(2)—False Statements in Acquisition of a Firearm
Title 18, United States Code, Section 922(a)(1)(a)—Dealing Firearms without a License