

United States Department of Justice

**For Immediate Release**

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**Central District of California**

## **Fifth Gang Member Sentenced to Life Without Parole After Convictions in Massive Federal Racketeering Case**

Other Members of Florencia 13 Gang Receive Multi-Decade Sentences for Numerous Crimes, Including Race-Based Attacks, Committed in Bid to Control Drug Trade and Extend Gang Territory into Other Neighborhoods

A fifth member of Florencia 13 (F13), a street gang involved in narcotics distribution and shootings of African-Americans, has been sentenced to life in federal prison for his conviction on a host of federal criminal charges, including racketeering and narcotics distribution.

Francisco Flores, 24, was sentenced Wednesday by United States District Judge David O. Carter in federal court in Santa Ana, California. Flores received a life sentence, plus a consecutive 10-year prison term. There is no parole in the federal prison system.

Flores was one of 10 gangsters linked to F13 who were found guilty just over a year ago of various federal charges, including violating the federal Racketeer Influence and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act. Flores was specifically convicted of violating RICO by conspiring to commit murder and participating in an attempted murder, participating in a RICO conspiracy, violent crime in aid of racketeering, conspiracy to traffic in narcotics, and use of a firearm.

During yesterday's sentencing hearing, Judge Carter said Flores targeted some of his victims because of their race. Flores "preyed on victims because they were black and for no other reason but racial motive," Judge Carter said.

A second F13 defendant was also sentenced late yesterday. Jose Gonzalez, 36, received a 20-year prison term from Judge Carter for his conviction on RICO and drug trafficking charges.

Flores and Gonzalez were convicted along with eight other F13 members in January 2009 following a 3½-month trial. Those 10 were among 104 defendants named in six F13-related indictments that were returned by a federal grand jury in the fall of 2007. The investigation into F13, which was called Operation Joker's Wild, led to what was at the time the largest gang takedown in American history, with 97 of the 104 defendants being taken into custody. Ninety-four of the defendants have now been convicted, either at trial or as the result of guilty pleas. Three defendants are pending trial. Two of the defendants died. Five of those named in the indictments are fugitives.

The 10 defendants convicted at trial last year were among two dozen people charged in one indictment that alleged violations of RICO. That indictment, and the evidence presented at trial,

focused on the criminal activities of the gang's leaders and enforcers, crimes that included drug trafficking, attempted murder and murder, and extortion. The jury in United States District Court in Santa Ana heard evidence about F13's criminal enterprise and its control by an incarcerated member of the Mexican Mafia prison gang and gang leaders on the street. F13 controlled drug distribution in the unincorporated areas south of the city of Los Angeles and certain other areas such as Huntington Park. Leaders of F13 collected taxes or “rent” from gang members and others who engaged in criminal conduct in F13 territory, in return for Mexican Mafia protection when they went to prison or jail. F13 operated a number of “drug spots” in the South Los Angeles area. The jury heard testimony that F13 members indiscriminately targeted African-Americans who were seen in their neighborhoods.

Four other F13 defendants convicted at trial on RICO charges previously received life sentences from Judge Carter. They are:

- Jesse Vasquez, 36, a South Gate resident, who was sentenced to life plus five years on January 29;
- Gilberto Oliva, 41, who was sentenced to life on January 11;
- Alberto Hernandez, 28, who was sentenced to life plus 32 years on Tuesday; and
- Manuel Hernandez, 27, who was sentenced on Tuesday to life plus an additional 110 years in prison.

Two other defendants recently received lengthy sentences. They are:

- Noe Gonzalez, 28, who was sentenced on Tuesday to 352 months in prison; and
- Arturo Cruz, 34, who on January 29 was sentenced to 60 years in prison.

During Cruz’s sentencing last Friday, Judge Carter commented on the criminal activities associated with F13: “I think this particular criminal organization is as ruthless as any the Court had seen. I've dealt with the Mexican Mafia, the Aryan Brotherhood now, soon to be the Mongols, but you really take first place. The racism displayed in these tapes, the hunting down and tracking of black citizens, whether they are rival gang members in territory selling drugs, or just the innocent young lady I saw [a robbery victim who was targeted because of her race] that came into this court is barbaric, and I think society needs to draw a rather strong line.”

The other two defendants convicted at trial—Cesar de la Cruz, 30, and Luis Aguilar, 38—are scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Carter later this month.

Operation Joker's Wild was an investigation into F13 conducted by the Los Angeles High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force, which is comprised of agents and officers with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department; the Drug Enforcement Administration; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); the Los Angeles Police Department; IRS-Criminal Investigation Division; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and the Los Angeles County Probation Department.

The Bell Gardens Police Department, the South Gate Police Department, the Long Beach Police

Department, the Torrance Police Department, the Baldwin Park Police Department, the Azusa Police Department, the El Monte Police Department, the United States Marshals Service-led Regional Fugitive Task Force, and California parole agents provided substantial assistance during the investigation.