

NEWS RELEASE



OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

San Diego, California

***United States Attorney
Karen P. Hewitt***

For Further Information, Contact:

Assistant U. S. Attorneys Michael Crowley (619) 557-5733 and John Parmley (619) 557-6198

For Immediate Release

SAN DIEGO STREET GANG MEMBERS WITH TIES TO THE MEXICAN MAFIA CHARGED WITH RACKETEERING CONSPIRACY, FIREARMS OFFENSES, AND DRUG-TRAFFICKING VIOLATIONS

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - February 13, 2009

San Diego, CA - A federal grand jury in San Diego has handed up fourteen (14) indictments and the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of California has filed two criminal complaints charging a total of 36 defendants with a federal racketeering conspiracy, firearm offenses, and drug trafficking violations. The charges stem from a year-long investigation entitled, "Operation Keys to the City," conducted by the multi-agency San Diego Violent Crimes Task Force-Gang Group which targeted the criminal activities of the Mexican Mafia (or "La Eme,"), Hispanic street gangs with ties to the Mexican Mafia, and the Mexico-based Arellano-Felix drug trafficking organization, announced United States Attorney Karen P. Hewitt.

The complaint (Case No. 09MJ0473) charges 13 individuals with participating in a Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) conspiracy. As set forth in the complaint, the defendants engaged in multiple racketeering acts in furtherance of the Mexican Mafia criminal enterprise, including,

among other things, attempted murder, kidnapping, assault, extortion, conspiracy to distribute controlled substances, and the distribution of controlled substances.

The RICO conspiracy complaint also sets forth how the Mexican Mafia criminal organization exerted control over illegal activities within the California prison system and on the streets of Southern California through a well-organized hierarchical structure led by Mexican Mafia members. According to the complaint, members delegate authority to Mexican Mafia associates to control specific areas both inside prisons and on the streets. This delegation of authority is referred to as giving “the keys” to the individual. In the prisons, Mexican Mafia members and associates control criminal activities on specific prison yards or an entire prison through acts of violence and threats.

Likewise, the Mexican Mafia seeks to control criminal activity in San Diego neighborhoods and in communities throughout California through similar means. For example, according to the complaint, on one such occasion, a Mexican Mafia member and his associates became involved in the collection of an outstanding drug debt for two Mexican nationals. The two Mexican nationals specifically sought the assistance of the Mexican Mafia. The group invaded the victim’s home armed with handguns and threatened to shoot the victim if payment was not forthcoming. The group then took four vehicles, approximately \$2,000 in cash, and other personal items from the victim and victim’s family. Finally, the group told the victim that if law enforcement were notified, the group would kill the victim and the victim’s family.

As alleged in the complaint, such transnational criminal activity was only part of an overall effort by Mexican Mafia members and associates to forge greater ties to Mexican organized crime groups, like the Arellano-Felix organization. The Mexican Mafia and the Arellano-Felix organization work together in international drug-trafficking operations as well as the commission of acts of violence, such as kidnapping and attempted murder, both in San Diego and Mexico.

The 14 indictments charge an additional 19 defendants with various drug-trafficking and firearms offenses. The drug-trafficking violations include conspiracies to distribute methamphetamine and heroin, the distribution of methamphetamine and heroin, and the possession of methamphetamine with the intent to

distribute. The gun-related charges include firearms trafficking, providing a firearm to a known felon, the possession of a firearm with an obliterated serial number, and felon in possession of a firearm.

In addition to membership and affiliations within the Mexican Mafia, the defendants charged in these indictments were involved with the following Hispanic street gangs in San Diego County:

National City Block Boys (“NCBB”)
Center Street Locos (San Diego)
Varrio Chula Vista (“VCV”)
Del Sol (San Diego)
Logan Red Steps (San Diego)
Old Town National City (“OTNC”)
National City Locos
Shelltown (San Diego)
Lomitas (San Diego)
Wop Town (San Diego)
Lomas (San Diego)
Otay
Paradise Hills (San Diego)
Logan Calle Triente (San Diego)

In a separate, but related, indictment (08cr4406BTM), four (4) additional individuals were charged on December 18, 2008, with a separate RICO conspiracy. The indictment alleges that the members of the Enterprise and their associates promoted a climate of fear through violence and threats of violence to protect their drug-trafficking operation.

United States Attorney Hewitt said, “The illegal activities of the Mexican Mafia extend from our prisons to our neighborhoods and across the international border to Mexico. It is an organization predicated upon violence and intimidation and fueled by drug-trafficking proceeds and extortion. These indictments mark a significant step toward attacking these criminal organizations and diminishing their influence in our community.”

FBI Special Agent in Charge Keith Slotter commented, “Today's arrests removed many of San Diego's most dangerous criminals from our streets. Though we were able to disrupt the activities of this violent organization, our work is not done. In order to keep our community safe, the FBI and our law enforcement partners remain committed to pursuing these gangs that engage in dangerous and illegal activities.”

U.S. Attorney Hewitt praised the coordinated effort of the several law enforcement groups led by the

Violent Crimes Task Force-Gang Group and the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force ("OCDETF") for the coordinated team effort culminating in the charges filed in these cases. The OCDETF program was created to consolidate and utilize all law enforcement resources in this country's battle against major drug trafficking.

DEFENDANTS

Mauricio Mendez	09cr0371DMS & 09MJ0473
Ernest Soqui	09MJ0473
Phillip McMillen	09MJ0473
Acradio Nieto	09MJ0473
Ruben Gonzalez	09MJ0473
David Rivas	09cr0374JM & 09MJ0473
Garrett Estock	09MJ0473
Ernest Lampley	09cr0370JLS
Rosario Mercado	09MJ0473
Melvin Berg	09MJ0473
Rodolfo Lopez	09MJ0473
Gerardo Canela	09MJ0473
Eduardo Macias	09MJ0473
Jorge Lerma-Duenas	09MJ0473
Jesus Rodriguez	09MJ0473
Kevin Smith	09MJ0475
Alberto Vasquez	09cr0378IEG
Jimmy Nava	09cr0378IEG
David Garcia	09cr0367MMA
Edgar Garcia	09cr0368WQH
Edward Sambrano	09cr0375JLS & 09cr0376L
James Isales	09cr0372JLS & 09cr0375JLS
Penny Duc	09cr0376L
Jose Placencia	09cr0372JLS
Lance Agundez	09cr0368WQH
Roxanne Rodriguez	09cr0368WQH
Jose Arteaga Gonzalez	09cr0368WQH
Ismael Fonseca	09cr0366W
Richard Ortiz	09cr0366W
Jack Edward Harrison	09cr0369H
Travis Chelberg	09cr0365BTM
Valentino Valladares	09cr0377BEN
Charles Richey	09cr0373IEG
Sorina Contreras	09cr0374JM
Daniel Durland	09cr0371DMS
Cynthia Marquez	09cr0371DMS

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

United States v. Mauricio Mendez, et. al. (Case Number 09MJ0473)

Title 18, United States Code, Section 1962(d) - Conspiracy to Conduct Enterprise Affairs
Through a Pattern of Racketeering Activity
Title 18, United States Code, Section 1951 - Interference with Commerce through Robbery and
Extortion

United States v. Kevin Smith, (Case Number 09MJ0475)

Title 21, United States Code, Sections 846 and 841(a)(1) - Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine

United States v. Alberto Vasquez, et. al. (Case Number 09CR0378IEG)

Title 21, United States Code, Sections 846 and 841(a)(1) - Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine

Title 21, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1) - Distribution of Methamphetamine

United States v. David Garcia, (Case Number 09CR0367MMA)

Title 21, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1) - Distribution of Methamphetamine

United States v. Edward Sambrano, et. al. (Case Number 09CR0375JLS)

Title 21, United States Code, Sections 846 and 841(a)(1) - Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine

Title 21, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1) - Distribution of Methamphetamine

Title 18, United States Code, Section 2 - Aiding and Abetting

United States v. Edward Sambrano, et. al. (Case Number 09CR0376L)

Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(g)(1) and 924(a)(2) - Felon in Possession of a Firearm

United States v. Jose Placencia, et. al. (Case Number 09CR0372JLS)

Title 21, United States Code, Sections 846 and 841(a)(1) - Conspiracy to Distribute Heroin

Title 21, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1) - Distribution of Heroin

Title 18, United States Code, Section 2 - Aiding and Abetting

Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(g)(1) and 924(a)(2) - Felon in Possession of a Firearm

United States v. Edgar Garcia, et. al. (Case Number 09CR0368WQH)

Title 21, United States Code, Sections 846 and 841(a)(1) - Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine

Title 21, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1) - Possession of Methamphetamine with Intent to Distribute

Title 18, United States Code, Section 2 - Aiding and Abetting

United States v. Ismael Fonseca, et. al. (Case Number 09CR0366W)

Title 26, United States Code, Sections 5861(d) and 5871 – Possession of an Unregistered Firearm

Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(g)(1) and 924(a)(2) - Felon in Possession of a Firearm

Title 21, United States Code, Sections 846 and 841(a)(1) - Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine

Title 21, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1) - Possession of Methamphetamine with Intent to Distribute

Title 18, United States Code, Section 2 - Aiding and Abetting

United States v. Jack Edward Harrison, (Case Number 09CR0369H)

Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(a)(1)(A) and 924(a)(1)(D) - Dealing Firearms without a License

United States v. Travis Chelberg, (Case Number 09CR0365BTM)

Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(g)(1) and 924(a)(2) - Felon in Possession of a Firearm

United States v. Valentino Valladares (Case Number 09CR0377BEN)

Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(g)(1) and 924(a)(2) - Felon in Possession of a Firearm

Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(k) and 924(a)(1)(B) - Possession of a Firearm with an Obliterated
Serial Number

United States v. Charles Richey, (Case Number 09CR0373IEG)
Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(g)(1) and 924(a)(2) - Felon in Possession of a Firearm

United States v. David Rivas, et. al. (Case Number 09CR0374JM)
Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(g)(1) and 924(a)(2) - Felon in Possession of a Firearm
Title 18, United States Code, Section 2 - Aiding and Abetting
Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(d) and 924(a)(2) - Sale of a Firearm to a Prohibited Person

United States v. Mauricio Mendez, et. al. (Case Number 09CR0371DMS)
Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(g)(1) and 924(a)(2) - Felon in Possession of a Firearm

United States v. Ernest Lampley, (Case Number 09CR0370JLS)
Title 18, United States Code, Sections 922(g)(1) and 924(a)(2) - Felon in Possession of a Firearm

United States v. Jose Flores, Jr., et al. (Case Number 08cr4406BTM)
Title 18, United States Code, Section 1962(d) - Conspiracy to Conduct Enterprise Affairs Through a Pattern of Racketeering Activity

AGENCIES

Federal Bureau of Investigation
San Diego Police Department
San Diego County Sheriff's Department
National City Police Department
San Diego County District Attorney's Office
U.S. Bureau of Prisons
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
San Diego County Probation Department
Immigration and Customs Enforcement

An indictment or a complaint are not evidence that the defendants committed the crimes charged. The defendants are presumed innocent until the Government meets its burden in court of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.