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JUNE 3, 2009 OMAHA, NE

36 gang members and associates arrested, 69 firearms seized Gang members allegedly sold weapons knowing they were intended for drug cartels

OMAHA, Neb. - U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, in close partnership with the Omaha Police Department and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), seized 69 firearms during an investigation that culminated Tuesday with the arrest of 36 gang members and gang associates. This is the latest joint local action of ICE's ongoing national efforts to target transnational gang members and stop the illicit flow of U.S. weapons to Mexico.

All 36 were arrested in Omaha and Lincoln, Neb., June 2 and have been identified as gang members or gang associates. The seized firearms, which include 14 assault rifles and a Barrett .50-caliber sniper rifle, were sold to a government informant who told the gang members and associates that he planned to ship the firearms to Mexico's drug cartels.

"This ICE investigation confirmed that gangs not only spread crime and fear throughout our neighborhoods, they are also eager to turn a profit by arming Mexico's violent drug cartels," said Claude Arnold, special agent in charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Bloomington, Minn. "ICE and our law enforcement partners are continuing to target violent street gangs and help keep our communities safe."

Along the U.S.-Mexico border, drug cartels, rival gangs and other criminal enterprises have steadily increased the violence to expand the scope of their operations. In the past few years, the level of violence on both sides of the border has reached a feverish pitch. In response, the governments of the United States and Mexico are engaged in bi-lateral law enforcement and intelligence sharing to identify, disrupt and dismantle transnational weapons-smuggling networks.

"This was an exceptional operation involving federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies," said U.S. Attorney Joe W. Stecher, District of Nebraska. "Gun, gang and drug crimes are borderless and, although ICE is the lead agency of this investigation, it is the coordinated efforts of the officers and all agencies that insure success. Numerous persons with firearms they cannot legally possess, and those firearms, have been taken off the streets. Such cooperation is paramount to protect our communities from the insidious gang and drug activity."

ICE received invaluable assistance in this investigation from the Omaha Police Department and the ATF.

"This case is an outstanding example of what law enforcement agencies can accomplish working together," said Omaha Police Chief Eric Buske. "The removal of these weapons from the street makes everyone safer and demonstrates that we will not tolerate criminals who provide the illegal firearms that wreak so much havoc."

"We are pleased with the outcome of this investigation; today's arrests of these violent gang members exemplify the success of ATF's partnerships with state, local, and federal law enforcement agencies," said Jeff Fulton, acting special agent in charge, ATF, Kansas City Field Division. "ATF remains committed to utilizing its resources to purchase firearms from illegal traffickers and put violent offenders behind bars."

The 69 weapons purchased from gang members and associates include: 22 handguns, 14 assault rifles, 16 shotguns, and 17 rifles, including a Barrett .50-caliber sniper rifle. During the operation agents also seized about \$40,000 in cash and small amounts of cocaine, crystal methamphetamine, and marijuana.

The following 20 individuals arrested Tuesday have been indicted by a federal grand jury or criminally charged by complaint.

- Esteban Hernandez, 23, arrested in Omaha, charged with knowingly selling a firearm to a felon and providing false information on a firearms form.
- Uriel Alvarez, 18, arrested in Omaha, charged with distributing a controlled substance.
- Gonzalo Rios, 18, arrested in Omaha, charged with State of Nebraska narcotics violations.
- Daniel Tellez-Lazcano, 52, arrested in Omaha, charged with illegally re-entering the United States after deportation.
- Carlos Gonzalo-Rios, 32, arrested in Omaha, charged with distributing a controlled substance.
- Norma Bobadilla-Salazar, 30, arrested in Omaha, charged with distributing a controlled substance.
- Moises Carrillo, 20, arrested in Omaha, charged with knowingly selling a firearm to a felon.
- Fredy Rincon, 23, arrested in Omaha, charged with knowingly selling a firearm to a felon.
- Ignacio Lopez-Buenrostro, 26, arrested in Omaha, charged with being an illegal alien possessing a firearm.
- Lorenzo Reyes, 33, arrested in Omaha, charged with distributing a controlled substance.
- Richard Gomez, 24, arrested in Lincoln, charged with knowingly selling a firearm to a felon.
- Gerardo Hernandez-Vazquez, arrested in Omaha, charged with State of Nebraska narcotics violations.
- Martin Noriega-Navarro, 45, arrested in Omaha, charged with knowingly selling a firearm to a felon and distributing a controlled substance.
- Giavana Carrillo, 19, arrested in Omaha, charged with distributing a controlled substance.

- Antonio Azpeitia-Rodriguez, 31, arrested in Omaha, charged with being an illegal alien possessing a firearm.
- Erick Garcia-Bartolo, 37, arrested in Omaha, charged with distributing a controlled substance.
- Roberto Gutierrez-Cisneros, 33, arrested in Omaha, charged with distributing a controlled substance.
- Carlos Guerrero-Hernandez, 22, arrested in Omaha, charged with being an illegal alien possessing a firearm and distributing a controlled substance.
- Luis Reyes-Cisnero, 23, arrested in Omaha, charged with being an illegal alien possessing of a firearm and distributing a controlled substance.

In addition to those criminally charged and indicted, ICE agents also arrested 16 gang members and associates on administrative immigration violations.

Many of those arrested have been convicted of past crimes, including: making terroristic threats, domestic violence, burglary, receiving stolen property, assault, carrying a concealed weapon, possessing a controlled substance with the intent to distribute, and cocaine possession.

Tuesday's arrests were made as part of an ongoing national initiative of the ICE National Gang Unit called Operation Community Shield. As part of this initiative, ICE partners with other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to target the significant public safety threat posed by transnational street gangs. Partnerships with local law enforcement agencies are essential to the success of the initiative, and they help further ensure officer safety during the operations.

Between February 2005, when Operation Community Shield was launched, through May 2009, ICE agents arrested 13,228 street gang members and associates, and seized 663 firearms as part of the initiative. More information on the ICE National Gang Unit is available at: www.ice.gov.

Charges contained in the indictment are simply accusations, not evidence of guilt. Evidence supporting the charges must be presented to a federal trial jury, whose duty is to determine guilt or innocence.

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