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HOME ABOUT NEWS MEET THE U.S. ATTORNEY DIVISIONS PROGRAMS EMPLOYMENT CONTACT US

Home » News » Press Release

## NEWS



## Leader and Eight Others Sentenced in Large Purchasing Organization

Sept. 19, 2012

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### *Two Defendants Get 15 Years Each*

McALLEN, Texas – One of the leaders of a large straw purchasing ring responsible for the purchase of more than 200 firearms is now headed to federal prison, United States Attorney Kenneth Magidson announced today along with Melvin King Jr., special agent in charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and Jerry Robinette, special agent in charge of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). Yahir Ricardo Garcia-Matias, 29, an alien illegally in the United States, was sentenced just a short time ago along with nine others responsible for making false statements on ATF Forms 4473 in the acquisition of firearms from federal firearms licensees (FFL)

Garcia-Matias pleaded guilty to one count of straw purchasing in one case and to being an illegal alien in possession of firearms in another. Today, U.S. District Judge Randy Crane sentenced him to 120 months for the firearms possession and another 60 months for straw purchasing to run consecutively for a total of 180 months in prison.

Also sentenced today was Jose Duran Loera, 26, of Mercedes, Texas, who pleaded guilty to possession of a firearm by a felon and straw purchasing and was sentenced to 120 and 60 months, respectively, which will also run consecutively for a total of 180 months in federal prison.

Judge Crane sentenced seven others in relation to this case today - Humberto Galvan, 22, Juan Angel Nunez Jr., 25, both of Mercedes; Jose Espinoza, 24, of Weslaco, Texas; Angelo Rosa, 23, and Antonio Espinoza, 22, both of Edinburg, Texas; Ashley Trevino, 22, of San Juan; and Maria Isela Morales, 22, of Donna, Texas, all of whom pleaded guilty to one count of straw purchasing at varying times.

Galvan, Antonio Espinoza, Jose Espinoza, Rosa, Trevino and Morales were all sentenced to 46-month-terms of imprisonment, while Nunez, who pleaded guilty to two different violations of straw purchasing, will serve a total of 108 months in prison.

Beginning in September 2010, ATF agents began investigating several individuals who had made large numbers of purchases of highly trafficked firearms from The Armory, an FFL in McAllen. Agents interviewed several involved in the case and discovered they had straw purchased firearms for Loera or Nunez. Loera and Nunez would recruit individuals to make the purchases, give them money to make to purchase, direct the buyers as to which store to use and what firearms to purchase. After the buyer had acquired the firearms they would then transfer to Nunez or Loera and be paid for making the purchase.

ATF agents identified Garcia-Matias and Nunez as senior members of the straw purchasing organization. On May 23, 2012, ATF agents received information that Nunez was attempting to straw purchase 10 AK-style rifles. Agents observed the purchase and after the firearms were loaded into Nunez's vehicle, agents approached and interviewed Nunez, at which time he admitted to straw purchasing in cooperation with Garcia-Matias who had provided the money to him. Nunez was followed back to the Rio Grande Valley where he was observed meeting with Garcia-Matias and another defendant, Juan Carlos Solis-Venegas, 39, an alien illegally in the United States, when Solis-Venegas turned the firearms over to them. After agents observed the firearms being transferred from Nunez's vehicle to the vehicle occupied by Garcia-Matias and Solis-Venegas, all were taken into custody. Solis-Venegas was identified by the parties as the person who brought the money to Garcia-Matias.

In total, Garcia-Matias was held to be responsible for well in excess of 200 firearms.

Solis-Venegas was also charged in this case and subsequently pleaded guilty. He will be sentenced Oct. 4, 2012, and will remain in in custody pending that hearing.

This prosecution was responsible for the prosecution of more than 25 leaders, recruiters and straw



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purchasers. The most of the firearms in the case were already in Mexico by the time agents were able to begin their investigation of the offenses and the majority of the prosecution was historical and based upon completed ATF Forms 4473 that were examined. No firearms were allowed into Mexico as a part of this investigation.

Garcia-Matias and Nunez have been in custody as are Loera and Juan Espinoza where they will remain pending transfer to a U.S. Bureau of Prisons facility to be determined in the near future. The remaining six sentenced today had been on bond but were remanded to custody following today's hearing.

The investigation was conducted by the ATF and Homeland Security Investigations. Assistant United States Attorney Steven Schammel prosecuted the case.



**HOME**

**ABOUT**

**NEWS**

**MEET THE USA**

**DIVISIONS**

**PROGRAMS**

**EMPLOYMENT**

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Former USAs

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Criminal  
Branches  
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LECC  
Victim Witness  
PSC  
PSN  
HTRA

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Support Staff  
Law Interns

Report a Crime  
Procurement

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