



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

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August 22, 2011

**FEDERAL PRISON SENTENCES HANDED DOWN IN AUSTIN-BASED
FIREARMS TRAFFICKING / MONEY LAUNDERING SCHEME**

United States Attorney John E. Murphy and Special Agent in Charge Dewey Webb, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Houston Field Division announced that in Austin this afternoon, 55-year-old Aurelia Ochoa Hernandez and 38-year-old Pedro Daniel Tovar were sentenced to 360 months and 97 months in federal prison, respectively, in connection with an Austin-based firearms trafficking and money laundering scheme.

In addition, United States District Judge Lee Yeakel ordered that Hernandez pay a \$10,000 fine, a \$4,700 mandatory special assessment and be placed under supervised release for a period of three years after completing her prison term. Tovar, who failed to appear in court for the reading of the jury verdict and was subsequently arrested by federal authorities in Las Vegas, Nevada, was ordered to pay a \$3,000 fine, \$500 mandatory special assessment and supervised release for a period of three years after completing his prison term.

“The deplorable level of violence perpetrated by drug traffickers in Mexico has resulted in the deaths of thousands of individuals, many of whom were innocent bystanders. A very high percentage of these murders were committed with firearms which originated in the United States, often bought by straw purchasers who provide the guns to smuggling organizations such as the one operated by these defendants,” stated United States Attorney John E. Murphy.

On May 13, 2011, a federal jury convicted Hernandez of conspiracy to smuggle firearms, to make false statements in firearm records and to commit money laundering as well as numerous substantive counts of the same offenses. Jurors also convicted Tovar of conspiracy to smuggle firearms, conspiracy to make false statements in firearms records and three substantive counts of making false statements in firearms records.

Evidence presented during trial revealed that Hernandez and Tovar were members of a criminal organization led by fugitive Juan Carlos Ramirez Zuniga, Hernandez and Jose “Joe” Lira. The group was responsible for acquiring semi-automatic assault firearms in Central Texas and smuggling the firearms to Zuniga in the Republic of Mexico. Testimony revealed that Zuniga is a member of the *Los Zetas* drug cartel. From October 2010 to January 2011, Lira enlisted numerous individuals, including Tovar, to make “straw” purchases of firearms, or recruit others to make straw purchases, from federally licensed firearms dealers throughout Austin and Central Texas. In exchange, straw purchasers received a fee for purchasing the firearms and delivering them to Lira. Hernandez then smuggled the firearms from Austin to Zuniga in Piedras Negras, Mexico. Hernandez returned to Austin with cash from Zuniga as compensation for the delivery of firearms and the purchase of additional firearms.

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Testimony revealed that during the scheme the organization was responsible for the delivery of at least 75 firearms to Zuniga in Mexico. In all, twenty defendants were convicted and sentenced to federal prison terms ranging from probation to 30 years in connection with this case.

“ATF continues to dismantle firearms trafficking rings. This case goes beyond the straw purchaser and disrupts the entire organization,” stated ATF Special Agent in Charge Dewey Webb, Houston Field Division.

This investigation was conducted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives with the assistance of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Round Rock Police Department. Assistant United States Attorneys Mark Lane and Jennifer Freel prosecuted this case on behalf of the Government.

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