



U.S. Department of Justice

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

December 13, 2010

**TOHATCHI MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO
FEDERAL DRUG TRAFFICKING OFFENSES**

United States Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales announced that, earlier today, **Dion Chato**, 23, an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation and resident of Tohatchi, New Mexico, entered a guilty plea to a seven-count federal indictment charging him with marijuana trafficking offenses before United States Magistrate Judge Lorenzo F. Garcia. Dion Chato has been in custody since his arrest on October 18, 2010 and faces up to twenty years imprisonment and a maximum \$500,000 fine at sentencing. His sentencing date has yet to be scheduled.

Dion Chato entered his guilty pleas pursuant to a plea agreement with the United States Attorney's Office. In the plea agreement, Dion Chato admitted that he and his 21-year old brother, Nephi Chato, sold marijuana out of their residential home in Tohatchi between May 21, 2010 and July 30, 2010. According to the plea agreement, Dion Chato admitted selling quantities of marijuana to a customer who turned out to be an undercover police officer of the Navajo Nation Department of Public Safety (NNDPS) on the following dates:

- May 21, 2010 – 38.1 grams of marijuana
- June 14, 2010 – 75.5 grams of marijuana
- June 16, 2010 – 106.1 grams of marijuana
- July 6, 2010 – 189.6 grams of marijuana
- July 30, 2010 – 209.9 grams of marijuana

Nephi Chato, who is charged as a co-defendant in this case, has entered a not guilty plea to the indictment and is pending trial. An indictment is merely an accusation, and a defendant is presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

Dion Chato and Nephi Chato were two of nine defendants arrested on October 18, 2010 on federal methamphetamine and marijuana charges following a five-month Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation code-named “Operation Yé’iitsoh.” The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Navajo Nation Department of Public Safety (NNDPS) initiated this Operation for the purpose of combating the growing drug trafficking problem in and around the Navajo Reservation. The Operation was brought as part of the Native American Project (NAP) Initiative, which is supported by the DEA’s Albuquerque District Office in partnership with the BIA and the NNDPS, and is funded by the HIDTA (High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area) program and the Office of National Drug Control Policy. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Samuel A. Hurtado.

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