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UNITED STATES CHARGES 50 LEADERS OF NARCO-TERRORIST FARC IN COLOMBIA WITH SUPPLYING MORE THAN HALF OF THE WORLD'S COCAINE

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Fifty leaders of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in Colombia have been indicted on charges of importing more than \$25 billion worth of cocaine into the United States and other countries, the Department of Justice announced today.

The one-count indictment returned by a federal grand jury in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia on March 1, 2006, and unsealed today, names as defendants 50 leaders of the FARC, a designated foreign terrorist organization. Three of the charged FARC leaders are currently in custody in Colombia, and the United States is seeking their extradition on the charges unsealed today. In addition, the U.S. Department of State announced more than \$75 million worth of rewards for information that leads to the capture of the remaining FARC leaders.

“This indictment strikes at the very heart of the FARC narcotics operation that has flooded our communities with cocaine,” said Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales. “Because of unprecedented cooperation between United States and Colombian authorities, we are closer than ever before to reaching our goal of bringing the leaders of this narco-terrorist group to justice in the United States.”

“We will continue our relentless pursuit of narco-terrorists wherever they may be found, in order to protect our citizens from the scourge of cocaine and other dangerous narcotics,” said Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division.

“The FARC is a designated foreign terrorist organization that funds its activities through a massive distribution network. By terrorizing local farmers in Colombia and attacking all those who threaten their operations, the FARC has built a cocaine empire that is the largest supplier in the United States,” said U.S. Attorney Michael J. Garcia of the Southern District of New York. “Today’s indictment signals our intention to seek extradition of the three leaders in custody and to relentlessly pursue the 47 other named narco-terrorists.”

“From their jungle hideaway, the FARC uses the drug trade to bankroll terrorism in Colombia, finance attacks on innocent citizens, and poison Americans,” said DEA Administrator Karen P. Tandy. “Today’s indictment challenges that lawlessness, and the FARC leadership should prepare to face the justice that they have long denied to so many.”

According to the indictment, the FARC currently supplies more than 50 percent of the world's cocaine and more than 60 percent of the cocaine that enters the United States. The FARC initially taxed other narcotics traffickers involved in the manufacture and distribution of cocaine in areas the FARC controlled, the indictment charges. Recognizing the increased profits available from the 1990s to the present, the FARC moved to become directly involved in the production and distribution of cocaine by, among other criminal activities, setting the prices to be paid to farmers across Colombia for cocaine paste—the raw material used to produce cocaine—and transporting cocaine paste to jungle laboratories under FARC control where it was converted into ton quantities of finished cocaine and then shipped out of Colombia to the United States and other countries. Recognizing that cocaine was the “lifeblood” of the FARC, the charged FARC leaders collected millions of dollars in cocaine proceeds and used the money to purchase weapons for the FARC's terrorist activities against the government and people of Colombia, according to the indictment.

According to the indictment, the charged FARC leaders used terrorism and violence to further the FARC's cocaine-trafficking activities and ordered that Colombian farmers who sold cocaine paste to non-FARC buyers or otherwise violated the FARC's strict cocaine policies be murdered. Colombian farmers who violated FARC rules were allegedly shot, stabbed or dismembered alive, and the bodies of murdered farmers were cut open, filled with rocks and sunk in nearby rivers. The defendants also allegedly ordered FARC members to kidnap and murder U.S. citizens to discourage the U.S. government from disrupting the FARC's cocaine-trafficking activities. According to the indictment, the charged FARC leaders authorized their members to shoot down U.S. fumigation planes, and plotted to retaliate against U.S. law enforcement officers who were conducting the investigation into the FARC's narcotics activities.

United States Seeks to Extradite Three FARC Leaders Currently In Colombian Custody

Attorney General Gonzales also announced today that the United States will immediately seek to extradite three of the charged FARC leaders who are currently in custody in Colombia. Jorge Enrique Rodriguez Mendieta, a.k.a "Ivan Vargas," Erminso Cuevas Cabrera, a.k.a "Mincho," and Juan Jose Martinez Vega, a.k.a "Gentil Alvis Patino," or "Chiguiri," will each be served with a United States provisional arrest warrant based on the indictment unsealed today—the first step in the extradition process. These three defendants led the FARC cocaine-trafficking activities in various ways, as described below:

- Jorge Enrique Rodriguez Mendieta, a.k.a “Ivan Vargas,” served as a member of the FARC's Estado Mayor or operational leadership council and as the Front Commander for the FARC's 24th Front. Rodriguez Mendieta allegedly directed the purchase of hundreds of thousands of kilograms of cocaine paste and transmitted billions of Colombian pesos in cocaine proceeds to other FARC officials. Rodriguez Mendieta is also alleged to have ordered the murder of at least eight farmers, including several whom he personally dismembered alive, and to have plotted to retaliate against United States law enforcement officers who were conducting the narcotics-trafficking investigation that led to the charges announced today. Rodriguez Mendieta was arrested by Colombian authorities in late 2004, and is in custody in Colombia.

- Erminso Cuevas Cabrera, a.k.a "Mincho," was a FARC associate who managed cocaine laboratories for the FARC's 14th Front. Cuevas Cabrera allegedly supervised the production and distribution of hundreds of thousands of kilograms of cocaine. He is also alleged to be the brother of charged Estado Mayor member Jose Benito Cabrera Cuevas, a.k.a "Fabian Ramirez." Cuevas Cabrera was arrested by Colombian authorities in late 2004, and is in custody in Colombia.
- Juan Jose Martinez Vega, a.k.a "Gentil Alvis Patino," a.k.a "Chiguiro," was a FARC associate who provided large quantities of arms and ammunition to the FARC in exchange for thousands of kilograms of cocaine. Martinez Vega was arrested in Venezuela in early 2005 during the rescue mission of former Detroit Tigers pitcher Ugueth Urbina's mother. At the time of his arrest in Venezuela, Martinez Vega was allegedly in possession of approximately 700 kilograms of cocaine. Martinez Vega is currently in custody in Colombia.

State Department Offers More Than \$75 Million In Rewards For Fugitive FARC Leaders

The United States Department of State announced today rewards of more than \$75 million for information leading to the capture of 24 of the FARC leaders charged today. Specifically, the State Department is offering rewards of up to \$5 million for information leading to the arrest of the seven members of the FARC Secretariat, the ultimate policy and decision-making body of the criminal enterprise. The State Department also is offering rewards of up to \$2.5 million for information leading to the arrest of 17 additional charged FARC leaders who are members of the FARC's "Estado Mayor," or governing council.

Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Anne Patterson, in announcing the rewards for the FARC leaders, said:

"The Department of State's Narcotics Rewards Program has successfully targeted the Cali, Medellin and Norte del Valle Cartels in Colombia, bringing many of their top leaders to justice. The FARC, responsible for much of the cocaine trafficked to the United States, is now in our sights, and I am pleased to announce these reward offers for its top leadership."

The investigation culminating in the indictment announced today was led by the International Narcotics Trafficking Unit of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York; the Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section (NDDS) of the Criminal Division at the Department of Justice, along with law enforcement officers from the DEA, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the Internal Revenue Service, working together as part of the New York OCADETF Strike Force, or "New York Strike Force." The New York Strike Force is composed of law enforcement officers from the DEA; ICE; the IRS; the FBI; the New York City Police Department; the New York State Police; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the U.S. Marshals Service. The investigation and prosecution are supported by trial attorneys from the Criminal Division's Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section and by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia. The indictment announced today

resulted from unprecedented cooperation between U.S. law enforcement officers and Colombian law enforcement authorities.

The charges contained in the indictment are merely allegations. All defendants are presumed innocent until and unless convicted in a court of law.

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