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FOUR ADDITIONAL BAKERSFIELD RESIDENTS CHARGED WITH FRAUD IN CONNECTION WITH FUNDS INTENDED FOR VICTIMS OF HURRICANE KATRINA - 53 DEFENDANTS NOW CHARGED

FRESNO- United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that additional indictments were returned for four more Bakersfield residents in three separate cases charged with participating in a wire fraud scheme to defraud the American Red Cross and Western Union of funds intended for victims of Hurricane Katrina. The new defendants are charged as follows:

MONIK MICHELLE GRIMES, 25, and SILVESTER MARTEZ KING, 26, were indicted in a five-count indictment for participating in a scheme to defraud the Red Cross and Western Union of hurricane relief funds. MONIK GRIMES was also charged in a separate count with lying to the FBI.

MYRTLE DEEANA JONES, 54, was also indicted in a five-count indictment for participating in a scheme to defraud the Red Cross and Western Union of hurricane relief funds.

PEACHES ANNE HARGRAVE, 53, was indicted in a two-count indictment with the same related Hurricane Katrina fraud.

All of these cases are being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Bakersfield, California. The cases are being prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office in Fresno, California.

United States Attorney Scott commented that the investigation continues and more arrests are anticipated. According to Scott, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force -- chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division -- includes members from the FBI, the Postal Inspection Service, the Executive Office of the United States Attorneys, and the Federal Trade Commission, among others.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Stanley A. Boone, who is prosecuting the cases, the indictments allege that the defendants participated in a plan or scheme to defraud the Red Cross by submitting or causing others to submit a fraudulent claim through the Red Cross

call center located in Bakersfield, California. The indictment explains that the Red Cross, in an attempt to expedite payments to actual victims of Hurricane Katrina, has set up at least two call centers in the United States, the largest of which is located in Bakersfield. According to the indictment, when a person contacts the call center to request assistance, their personal information, including an address within the area affected by the hurricane, is verified by call center employees. Once that information is verified, the caller is provided instructions on how to obtain financial assistance from the Red Cross. Once assistance is approved, a victim is given instructions on how to obtain that assistance at their closest Western Union branch.

The charged fraud counts for each defendant carry a maximum of 20 years in prison and/or a \$250,000 fine.

The charges are only allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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