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MS-13 LEADER SENTENCED TO 45 YEARS IN PRISON FOR INVOLVEMENT IN RICO CONSPIRACY

WASHINGTON – A leader of La Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, was sentenced today to 45 years in prison for his participation in a racketeering enterprise, Acting Assistant Attorney General Matthew Friedrich of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney Edward M. Yarbrough of the Middle District of Tennessee announced.

Escolastico Serrano, a/k/a "Chito," was also sentenced today by Chief U.S. District Judge Todd J. Campbell of the Middle District of Tennessee in Nashville to serve five years of supervised release.

At his plea hearing on July 28, 2008, Serrano admitted that, as leader of the MS-13 gang, he conspired with others to participate in a pattern of racketeering activity in the Nashville metropolitan area that included murder, attempted murder and witness tampering. In addition to personally committing various acts of violence, Serrano admitted he exercised leadership by enforcing the rules of MS-13 and inciting other members to attack and kill rival gang members. Serrano admitted that on Aug. 15, 1998, he and other MS-13 gang members attempted to kill by stabbing repeatedly individuals believed to be rival gang members who disrespected MS-13. Serrano also admitted that on May 21, 2006, he and other MS-13 gang members fired a handgun at an individual who was suspected of being a member of the rival street gang Brown Pride. The victim was struck and wounded in the arm. In addition, Serrano admitted that on June 17, 2006, he and several fellow MS-13 members shot and killed two rival gang members sitting inside a car at a traffic light. Serrano further admitted that on Aug. 26, 2006, while he and other MS-13 members were in Huntingburg, Ind., they shot at individuals who disrespected MS-13. Finally, Serrano admitted that in August 2006, he and other MS-13 members discussed and planned the murder of a Brown Pride member who worked at a food processing facility outside Nashville.

Serrano is the sixth defendant to be sentenced on RICO charges stemming from an indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Nashville on Jan. 10, 2007. That indictment charged 14 members of MS-13 with conspiring to participate in the affairs of a racketeering enterprise and related charges including murder, attempted murder, assault, weapons charges and obstruction of justice.

Five other defendants were previously sentenced to prison after pleading guilty to the RICO conspiracy. Walter Hernandez was sentenced on March 31, 2008, to 324 months in prison. On Dec. 3 and Dec. 7, 2007, respectively, Henry Garballo-Vasquez and Jose Alfaro were sentenced to 240 months in prison. On Nov. 20, 2007, Geovanni Pena received a sentence of 235 months in prison. On Sept. 8, 2008, Ericka Cortez received a sentence of 46 months in prison.

According to the indictment, the MS-13 gang is a violent international criminal organization composed primarily of immigrants or descendants of immigrants from El Salvador. The purpose of the racketeering enterprise was to preserve and protect the power, territory and profits of the MS-13 enterprise through violent assault, murder, threats of violence and intimidation.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jimmie Lynn Ramsaur of the Middle District of Tennessee and Trial Attorney John Han from the Criminal Division's Gang Squad.

The case was investigated by the Nashville Metropolitan Police Department's Gang Suppression Unit, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Davidson County District Attorney General's Office, the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Middle District of Tennessee and the Criminal Division's Gang Squad.

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