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MS-13 MEMBER SENTENCED TO 25 YEARS IN PRISON FOR INVOLVEMENT IN RICO CONSPIRACY

WASHINGTON – A member of La Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, was sentenced today to 25 years in prison and five years of supervised release for his participation in a racketeering enterprise, Acting Assistant Attorney General Rita M. Glavin of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney Edward M. Yarbrough of the Middle District of Tennessee announced. Manuel Marquez, a/k/a “Morro,” was sentenced in Nashville, Tenn., by Chief Judge Todd J. Campbell of the Middle District of Tennessee.

At his plea hearing on Dec. 17, 2007, Marquez admitted that he and others involved in the MS-13 gang conspired to participate in a pattern of racketeering activity in the Nashville metropolitan area that included murder, attempted murder and witness tampering. Marquez admitted that on April 12, 2006, he and other MS-13 gang members fired handguns at a rival gang member and his girlfriend. The rival gang member was struck several times and sustained permanent physical injuries. Marquez 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.

Marquez admitted that on June 17, 2006, he and other MS-13 gang members shot and killed two rival gang members sitting inside a car at a traffic light. Marquez also 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. Marquez also admitted that on Aug. 26, 2006, he and other MS-13 gang members discussed and planned the murder of rival gang members outside a Nashville nightclub. Marquez further admitted that on Sept. 3, 2006, he and another MS-13 gang member shot at a crowd of suspected rival gang members outside a different Nashville nightclub, wounding two men. Finally, Marquez admitted that on Sept. 4, 2006, he and another MS-13 gang member shot a rival gang member several times in the back at Percy Priest Lake outside Nashville.

Marquez is the last of the defendants to be sentenced on RICO charges stemming from an indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Nashville on Jan. 10, 2007. The 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.

Thirteen 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. On Sept. 16, 2008, Escolastico Serrano received a sentence of 45 years in prison. On Sept. 25, 2008, Ronald Fuentes received a life prison sentence. On Oct. 3, 2008, Ernesto Mendez-Tovar received a sentence of 13 years in prison. On Oct. 6, 2008, Eliseo Iglesias received a sentence of 210 months in prison. On Oct. 7, 2008, David Alexander Gonzalez received a sentence of 235 months in prison. On Nov. 10, 2008, Oscar Serrano received a sentence of life plus 20 years in prison, to be served consecutively. On Nov. 14, 2008, Omar Hirbin Gomez was sentenced to 14 years in prison. And on Nov. 19, 2008, Francisco Dago Mendez was sentenced to 14 years 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 Unit.

The case was investigated by the Criminal Division's Gang Unit; the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Middle District of Tennessee; 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; and the Davidson County District Attorney General's Office.

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