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MS-13 MEMBER PLEADS GUILTY TO SHOOTING A ROBBERY VICTIM

Greenbelt, Maryland - William A. Mendez, age 21, also known as "Pitufu," of Gaithersburg, pleaded guilty today to committing a violent crime in aid of the racketeering activities of an MS-13 gang, announced United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein and Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division.

According to his plea agreement, La Mara Salvatrucha, also known as MS-13, is a gang composed primarily of immigrants or descendants of immigrants from El Salvador, with members operating throughout Prince George's County and Montgomery County, Maryland, and elsewhere. MS-13 is a national and international criminal organization with approximately 10,000 members.

MS-13 is organized in "cliques," including the Fulton Locos Salvatruchos (FLS), the Sailors Locos Salvatruchos Westside, the Teclas Locos Salvatruchos and the Langley Park Salvatruchos. Mendez was a member of the FLS clique. The MS-13 cliques work together cooperatively to commit acts of violence.

On December 30, 2005, Mendez and two others associated with MS-13 knocked on the door of an apartment on Duvall Lane in Gaithersburg, Maryland. When the occupants opened the door, Mendez brandished a handgun and announced a robbery. During the course of the robbery, one of the occupants stated to Mendez that he did not believe that the handgun was real. Mendez then shot that individual once, striking him in the neck. Mendez and his accomplices proceeded to rob the occupants of approximately \$3,000 in currency, assorted jewelry and cell phones. The robbery and assault were part of an ongoing effort by MS-13 to rob and extort individuals and businesses in the community, and were committed to maintain or increase Mendez's position within his clique and the overall MS-13 enterprise.

Mendez faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison followed by five years of supervised release. U.S. District Judge Deborah K. Chasanow scheduled sentencing for January 4, 2008 at 1:00 p.m.

To date, this office has charged 47 MS-13 gang members with various federal offenses; 17 gang members have been convicted at trial or pled guilty to RICO charges and 12 have pleaded guilty to other charges, mostly immigration or gun violations.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein praised the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and the Montgomery County Police Department for their investigative work in this case. Mr. Rosenstein thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Chan Park and Trial Attorney David Jaffe, a prosecutor for the Justice Department's Gang Squad, who are prosecuting the case.