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TEXAS MAN SENTENCED TO 292 MONTHS IN PRISON FOR ADVERTISING AND POSSESSING CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

WASHINGTON - Mark Edwin Cairnes, 51, was sentenced today to 292 months in prison and lifetime supervised release following his prison term for advertising and possessing child pornography, Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division Lanny A. Breuer and U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Texas John E. Murphy announced.

Cairnes, of Jonestown, Texas, pleaded guilty on Sept. 25, 2009, before U.S. District Judge Sam Sparks in Austin, Texas, to one count of advertising child pornography and one count of possession of child pornography. As part of his plea agreement, Cairnes admitted to being a member of an Internet-based bulletin board group dedicated to the trading of child pornography. The group could only be accessed by using a unique username and password. The groups had very detailed rules for behavior, including requiring all members to post only pornographic images or videos depicting minors under the age of 18. Members were also required to post their images or videos in pre-established categories based on the type of material, such as the hardcore category, which contained only images or links to images that depicted minors engaged in sexually explicit acts with either adults or other minors.

Cairnes admitted he was an active participant on the bulletin board and that his involvement dated from October 2006. Cairnes also admitted that on some occasions he made requests for images and videos of child pornography by name or by providing "sample images" of the material he sought. Cairnes also admitted to commenting on the quality of the child pornography he received from other members and expressing his gratification upon seeing the images and videos of child pornography, some of which depicted children approximately five years old. Through his plea, Cairnes also admitted to possessing tens of thousands of images of child pornography, including images of the sexual abuse of infants and images of children engaged in sadistic and masochistic abuse.

Cairnes was identified through "Operation Joint Hammer," the U.S. component of an ongoing global enforcement operation targeting transnational rings of child pornographers. The operation has led to the arrest of more than 60 people in the United States involved in the trade of child pornography. Operation Joint Hammer was initiated through evidence developed by European law enforcement and shared with U.S. counterparts by Europol and Interpol. The

European portion of this global enforcement effort, “Operation Koala,” was launched after the discovery of the activities of several people in Europe who were abusing children and producing photographs of the abuse for commercial gain. Further investigation unveiled a number of online child pornography rings.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Matthew B. Devlin of the Western District of Texas and Trial Attorney Alecia Riewerts Wolak of the Criminal Division’s Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section. The investigation was handled by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

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