



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
August 8, 2014

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US Marshals, Interpol Nab Fugitive from El Salvador in Calif.

WASHINGTON - An investigation spearheaded by the U.S. Marshals International Investigations Branch and the Fugitive Division of Interpol Washington, U.S. National Central Bureau, resulted in the arrest of Gerardo Francisco Mejia Coto, a member of a vicious group of kidnapers, assailants, and bank robbers known as the "Tacoma Cabrera" gang, in California.

"The arrest of Gerardo Francisco Mejia Coto clearly demonstrates the commitment of the United States Marshals Service to pursue those wanted on an international level," said U.S. Marshals Service Director Stacia Hylton. "The capture of this dangerous individual in the United States sends a strong message to criminals around the globe that domestic and international law enforcement cooperation and resources are substantial, and that crossing global boundaries to avoid apprehension for heinous crimes committed elsewhere, is no longer a viable option."

Tuesday, Aug. 5, members of the U.S. Marshals Pacific Southwest Regional Fugitive Task Force, which includes officers from the Department of Homeland Security Enforcement Removal Operations as well as several other federal, state, and local authorities, alongside the Redwood City Police Department and the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office, took Mejia Coto into custody without incident. He is being detained pending review. In addition to any charges Mejia Coto may face in the United States, he is also looking at the possibility of life imprisonment in El Salvador for the crimes of murder, attempted murder, aggravated theft, and aggravated robbery.

In July 2007, El Salvador issued an Interpol Red Notice indicating that Mejia Coto was a key figure in the gang, helping to organize and execute numerous bank robberies and armored car hijackings, that ultimately resulted in the death of two persons and the injuring of numerous others.

Mejia Coto's involvement with the Tacoma Cabrera gang dates back several years, as he is believed to be a founding member. Between 2000 and 2001 alone, Mejia Coto and others allegedly committed no less than 15 armored car and bank robberies. Additionally, the gang frequently hijacked arms and weapons shipments destined for the El Salvadorian Military and Police, the contents of which were later used to facilitate the robberies. Documented press releases in Central America of the previous crimes, describe how Mejia Coto was known for his "safe-cracking and high speed getaway driving skills." It was not uncommon for the gang to execute the robberies with maximum force to insure a successful heist by utilizing hand grenades, AK-47 and M-16 automatic rifles, in addition to other similar high powered weaponry.

After being actively sought by El Salvadorian authorities for his participation in the crimes, Mejia Coto fled the jurisdiction. Over the course of the several years, he assumed multiple identities and aliases in order to evade capture.

The fugitive investigation gained significant momentum when a criminal investigator from the USMS Northern District of California, who was working on a detail at Interpol Washington, was able to use resources available to him to further the hunt. Familiar with the previous unsuccessful attempts to locate the fugitive, and armed with new information, the investigator was able to determine Mejia Coto's possible location in California in a very short period of time, which ultimately led to his arrest.

“The U.S. Marshals fugitive task force in the San Francisco Bay Area brings a wide mix of specialties and expertise to the table, as demonstrated time and again with the quality of arrests made by our officers,” said U.S. Marshal of the Northern District of California Don O’Keefe. “We have and will continue to tirelessly pursue wanted and dangerous individuals. No matter where they go or what border they cross, rest assured that we will track them down and return them to justice, wherever that may be.”

“Mejia Coto’s arrest illustrates how powerful and effective the working relationships between Interpol Washington and its partner agencies, including the U.S. Marshals Service and ICE/ERO, can be when combatting transnational crime and terrorism,” said Interpol Washington Director Shawn A. Bray. “In support of our partners, we continue to leverage the Interpol Notice Program and resources to share critical law enforcement information with foreign counterparts that is vital to the success of these international investigations and arrests.”

The efforts of the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office, the Redwood City Police Department, the San Mateo Police Department, the Department of Homeland Security ICE-ERO National Fugitive Operations Program, the U.S. Marshals Service, and the U.S. Marshals Service Pacific Southwest Regional Fugitive Task Force participating member agencies all contributed to Mejia Coto arrest.

To find information on fugitives currently being sought by the U.S. Marshals in Northern California, or to submit a tip on the whereabouts of a fugitive, please visit: <http://northerncaliforniamostwanted.org>

The U.S. Marshals Service is the primary federal agency charged with conducting fugitive investigations throughout the United States. The U.S. Marshals Service regularly works in concert with other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to seek out and arrest violent fugitives and sex offenders, and has established task forces throughout the nation to facilitate the apprehension of fugitives.

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For more information about the U.S. Marshals Service, visit: <http://www.usmarshals.gov>

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