



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, June 19, 2009

*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

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CHILD SMUGGLER OF 10 YEAR OLD BOY SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR 15 MONTHS

TUCSON – Rafael Romero-Palacios, 40, of Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, was sentenced this week to 15 months in prison by U.S. District Court Judge Cindy K. Jorgenson. Romero-Palacios pleaded guilty on April 6, 2009, to Conspiracy to Transport an Illegal Alien for Profit.

Romero-Palacios attempted to enter the United States on January 13, 2009, at the Nogales, Ariz. Port of Entry accompanied by his 12 year-old daughter and a 10-year-old boy. Romero-Palacios presented legitimate laser visas for both minors, including his own son's laser visa on behalf of the ten-year-old boy to facilitate illegal entry of the boy. The Customs Officer became suspicious and referred them all for further inspection. During questioning, Romero-Palacios admitted that he was attempting to smuggle the boy into the United States from Mexico. He stated that his sister contacted him and asked him if he knew anyone who would be willing to smuggle a child from Mexico into the United States. He told her to bring the child to his home. Once the boy was brought to his home, Romero-Palacios realized that the boy was the same age as his own son and agreed to smuggle the boy into the United States. Romero-Palacios was to be paid \$400 to smuggle the boy to a bus stop in Tucson, Ariz. Romero-Palacios stated that the child and his mother had been staying at the home of his sister in Mexico, before his sister contacted him.

On February 11, 2009 Romero-Palacios was charged in federal court in Tucson, with Conspiracy to Transport an Illegal Alien for Financial Gain and other federal alien smuggling charges. The conspiracy offense is punishable by imprisonment for a term of ten years or more.

The smuggled child was turned over to the custody of the Mexican Consulate who then turned him over to the Mexican Department of Family Services (the Mexican equivalent of U.S. Child Protective Services) to be reunited with his family.

The investigation in this case was conducted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Douglas. The prosecution was handled by Raquel Arellano, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Tucson.

CASE NUMBER: CR-09-00179-TUC-CKJ
RELEASE NUMBER: 2009-203(Romero-Palacios)

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