



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, June 23, 2009

For Information Contact Public Affairs
WYN HORNBUCKLE
Telephone: (602) 514-7573
Cell: (602) 740-2422

MEXICAN CITIZEN FOUND GUILTY IN JURY TRIAL, FACES OVER 100 YEARS IN PRISON FOR VIOLENT HOSTAGE TAKING AND ALIEN SMUGGLING CONSPIRACY

PHOENIX – Carlos Alvarez-Espinoza, 22, a citizen of Mexico, was found guilty of Conspiracy to Take Hostages, five counts of Hostage Taking, Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal Aliens, Harboring Illegal Aliens, and five counts of Brandishing a Firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence, by a federal jury in Phoenix. The case was tried before United States District Court Judge David G. Campbell from June 15 to June 19, 2009. The defendant will remain in custody pending sentencing. Sentencing is set before Judge Campbell on October 19, 2009.

Five defendants were charged in the Superseding Indictment. Two defendants previously pled guilty to gun counts, one is set for trial in September 2009, and the remaining defendant is currently awaiting trial in Maricopa County Superior Court and his case in federal court will go forward after the state matter is resolved.

“This case demonstrates the greed and violence that now characterizes alien smuggling in Arizona,” said U.S. Attorney Diane J. Humetewa. “Thanks to our vigilant law enforcement, hostages were freed and these violent criminals were brought to justice.”

The evidence at trial showed that Alvarez-Espinoza along with at least four others were part of a violent group of alien smugglers. In May 2008, this group held at least 23 illegal aliens hostage at a house in Phoenix. While held hostage at gunpoint, one victim was beaten with fists while others were pistol whipped, and all were threatened with death. At least two people escaped by jumping out a second story window after which Alvarez-Espinoza and a co-defendant told the aliens that they were going to look for one of the escapees and make him pay by taking him out to the desert and killing him. Soon thereafter, Alvarez-Espinoza drove away from the house with a co-defendant and two undocumented aliens. At the direction of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Phoenix Police Department performed a traffic stop on a vehicle driven by the defendant. A loaded firearm, possessed by Alvarez-Espinoza, was found in his car. A federal search warrant was then executed at the alien stash house where two additional co-defendants were located along with 21 hostages. The evidence demonstrated that the defendant lived at the stash house and brandished a firearm during the hostage taking at all five victims who testified at trial.

“This investigation and successful prosecution is a testament to the strong partnerships and the commitment of the agents, officers, and prosecutors who are working together to make Phoenix a safer place,” said Matthew Allen, Special Agent in Charge of ICE Investigations in Arizona. “The violence exhibited by the defendant in this case will not be tolerated by law enforcement and the community.”

-MORE-

A conviction for Hostage Taking and Firearm charges carry a maximum penalty of life in prison years, a \$ 250,000 fine or both. These penalties must be served consecutively. Since Alvarez-Espinoza was convicted of five gun counts, he faces a mandatory minimum of 107 years for those counts alone. In determining an actual sentence, Judge Campbell will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence but is bound by the statute requiring that a mandatory minimum sentence be imposed.

The investigation leading to the guilty verdict was conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Phoenix Police Department and the El Dorado County Sheriff's Office in California. The prosecution was handled by Lisa Jennis Settel and Josh Parecki, Assistant U.S. Attorneys, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR-08-611-PHX-DGC
RELEASE NUMBER: 2009-210(Alvarez-Espinoza)

###

For more information on the U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Arizona, visit <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/az/>