



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Monday, November 2, 2009

*Office of the United States Attorney  
District of Arizona*

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## **DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION LEADER SENTENCED TO OVER 21 YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON**

PHOENIX – Aaron Quintero-Soto, 41, of Sinaloa, Mexico, was sentenced here by U.S. District Judge Earl H. Carroll to 262 months in federal prison to be followed by 25 years of supervised release. The Court also ordered the defendant to forfeit all interest in \$199,297 and a 2001 Dodge Caravan seized as part of the investigation. On June 4, 2009, Aaron Quintero-Soto pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine, Cocaine, and Cocaine Base (crack cocaine). Quintero-Soto was the leader and one of five members of a Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO) to be prosecuted and sentenced after a three-month investigation by federal and local law enforcement agencies.

The U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona Dennis K. Burke stated: “This investigation and prosecution puts a significant DTO out of business and its leaders in federal prison. This organization was responsible for importing significant amounts of methamphetamine, cocaine, and crack into the United States with devastating effect on communities. We are grateful to the agencies – the OCDETF Strike Force, ICE, and the Phoenix Police Department – whose intense and collaborative investigation led to these arrests and prosecutions.”

Between August 15, 2008 and August 21, 2008, the Drug Enforcement Administration conducted a Title III wiretap investigation into the Quintero-Soto Drug Trafficking Organization, a major Mexican-based, family-run drug organization. The Quintero-Soto DTO imported methamphetamine, cocaine, and crack cocaine from Mexico into the United States, specifically to Phoenix, and then distributed the illegal drugs to destinations throughout the United States. The Quintero-Soto DTO also engaged in money laundering and bulk cash smuggling by transporting drug proceeds in U.S. currency back to Mexico utilizing secret compartments in vehicles to hide the money. During this investigation, agents seized 35.3 kilograms of cocaine, just over 17 pounds of methamphetamine that was between 83 and 98 percent pure, approximately 1.7 pounds of crack cocaine, \$199,297 in U.S. currency, and a 2001 Dodge Caravan.

“This sentencing closes the door on a ruthless Mexican drug cartel that used Phoenix as a transshipment point for their drug trafficking operations,” said DEA Special Agent in Charge Elizabeth Kempshall. “This organization controlled a pipeline of illicit drugs that threatened our communities and the welfare of our children.” This multi-agency Strike Force is a proven law enforcement tool for combating organizations that have chosen to use Arizona as a venue for their illegal drug trade.”

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“Partnerships continue to be critical in the investigation of drug trafficking organizations and the crimes associated with them. I will continue to be committed to these types of investigations,” stated Phoenix Public Safety Manager Jack Harris. “I am proud of the work done by the task force that led to these convictions.”

Four others members of the Quintero-Soto DTO were also sentenced:

Manuel Quintero-Soto, 33, of Sinaloa, Mexico, (brother of Aaron Quintero-Soto) was also sentenced on October 29th by U.S. District Judge Earl H. Carroll to 70 months in federal prison to be followed by 10 years of supervised release. The Court also ordered the defendant to forfeit all interest in \$199,297 and a 2001 Dodge Caravan seized as part of the investigation. On June 4, 2009, Manuel Quintero-Soto pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine, Cocaine, and Cocaine Base (crack cocaine).

Macario Lechuga-Astorga, 33, of Sinaloa, Mexico, was sentenced September 25th by U.S. District Judge Earl H. Carroll to 96 months in the Bureau of Prison to be followed by 5 years of supervised release. The Court also ordered the defendant to forfeit all interest in \$199,297 and a 2001 Dodge Caravan seized as part of the investigation. On July 15, 2009, Macario Lechuga-Astorga pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine, Cocaine, and Cocaine Base (crack cocaine).

Maria Guadalupe Candelario-Juarez, 45, of Sonora, Mexico, was sentenced on August 12th by U.S. District Judge Earl H. Carroll to 37 months in the Bureau of Prison to be followed by 3 years of supervised release. The Court also ordered the defendant to forfeit all interest in \$199,297 and a 2001 Dodge Caravan seized as part of the investigation. On May 20, 2009, Maria Guadalupe Candelario-Juarez pleaded guilty to Laundering of Monetary Instruments.

Maria Silvia Candelario-Juarez, 36, of Sonora, Mexico (sister of Maria Guadalupe Candelario-Juarez), was sentenced on August 12th by U.S. District Judge Earl H. Carroll to time served (358 days) to be followed by 2 years of supervised release. The Court also ordered the defendant to forfeit all interest in \$199,297 and a 2001 Dodge Caravan seized as part of the investigation. On May 20, 2009, Maria Silvia Candelario-Juarez pleaded guilty to Use of a Communication Facility in Causing or Facilitating the Commission of Felonies Under the Controlled Substances Act.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration OCDETF Strike Force, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Phoenix Police Department. The prosecution was handled by Jonell L. Lucca, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR-0992-PHX-EHC  
RELEASE NUMBER: 2009-343(Quintero-Soto et al.)

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