

NEWS RELEASE



OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

San Diego, California

*United States Attorney
Laura E. Duffy*

For Further Information, Contact: Assistant U.S. Attorney Alessandra Serano (619) 546-8104

For Immediate Release

NORTH PARK GANG MEMBERS INDICTED IN RACKETEERING CONSPIRACY

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – January 8, 2014

SAN DIEGO – Twenty-four alleged North Park gang members and associates are charged in an indictment unsealed today as members of a racketeering conspiracy that involved cross-country sex trafficking of underage girls and women plus murder, kidnapping, robbery and drug-related crimes.

Early this morning detectives and agents from the San Diego Police Department and the FBI, with assistance from other agencies, made 17 arrests in San Diego, Arizona and New Jersey and served 11 search warrants in San Diego and Arizona. Four defendants were already in custody on other charges. The local defendants are scheduled to make their first court appearances tomorrow at 1:30 p.m. before U.S. Magistrate Judge Barbara Major. Three defendants are fugitives.

According to the federal grand jury indictment, the primary business of the gang was sex trafficking in 46 cities across 23 states. The organization was known as “BMS,” which is a combination of “Black MOB” and “Skanless” gangs, and these members are also allegedly aligned with other streets gangs, including Neighborhood Crips, Lincoln Park and West Coast Crips, among others.

The BMS gang was formed as a result of cooperation between these gangs and the members took on different responsibilities within the criminal enterprise, according to the indictment. Some managed the prostitutes and transported them all over the country; some forcefully coerced these women into prostitution and maintained their obedience and loyalty through acts of violence; some handled the money; some placed advertisements to generate business or booked motel rooms in which acts of prostitution took place; and others distributed drugs.

The defendants are charged with racketeering conspiracy - the statute traditionally used for organized-crime syndicates and mobsters. But as criminal street gangs such as these join forces and become more sophisticated and prolific in their illicit business pursuits, this statute is an effective tool to address all aspects of the criminal conduct.

This is the second time the U.S. Attorney's office in this district has used the racketeering statute to charge dozens of gang members with operating a criminal enterprise that included drugs, human trafficking and violence. In the first case, 39 Oceanside gang members and associates were charged with racketeering, and to date, 34 have pleaded guilty.

"Together with our law enforcement partners, we have rescued scores of sex trafficking victims from the grips of gangsters and we have restored a higher level of safety to the gang's operational base - the community of North Park - and beyond," said U.S. Attorney Laura Duffy.

"The kind of sex trafficking described in this indictment is nothing less than modern-day slavery," Duffy said. "Unfortunately, more gangs are expanding from traditional pursuits like drug dealing into this lucrative business. These gangsters are preying upon our youth, and we are using every law enforcement resource to keep our children and our communities safe from these predators."

"This RICO investigation was truly a joint effort between the San Diego Police Department, the U.S. Attorney's Office and the FBI," said San Diego Police Chief William Lansdowne. "I am extremely proud of the detectives and the investigative personnel who worked tirelessly on this case which has increased the safety of our community. Thousands of hours were spent on intelligence gathering, undercover operations, and interviews of victims and witnesses. Due to the investigative efforts of all involved, girls and women were rescued from a life they were being forced into. In addition, numerous gang members and associates of this criminal organization have been indicted and/or arrested."

FBI Special Agent in Charge Daphne Hearn, commented, "Today's arrests are the result of a long term multi-agency investigation conducted under the FBI's Innocence Lost National Initiative (ILNI). One of the goals of the FBI's ILNI is to disrupt and dismantle criminal enterprises responsible for the victimization of children through prostitution. Through the efforts of the ILNI, more than 2,300 children that were forced into prostitution have been located and recovered, and more than 1,200 subjects have been convicted. Today's arrest in San Diego and federal racketeering charges filed in this case exemplifies the FBI's continued effort to work with our law enforcement partners to disrupt and dismantle criminal enterprises that seek to profit from the sexual exploitation of our nation's children.

"The collaboration between federal and local law enforcement in San Diego is unparalleled, and this case is another fine example of utilizing our strategic law enforcement partnerships to combat an

increasingly dangerous fusion of violent gangs and organized crime, said Derek Benner, special agent in charge for ICE's Homeland Security Investigations in San Diego. "With this group of violent street gang members, drug dealers, sex traffickers, and other criminals off the streets, we have delivered on our commitment to public safety so that the law abiding people living and working in our neighborhoods are safe."

The indictment alleges that these defendants recruited girls and women from El Cajon Boulevard and elsewhere to work as prostitutes. And they also used social media like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to lure unwitting young girls into the lifestyle with rap videos and promises of a glamorous life. Many of these videos are posted on YouTube.

The gang members allegedly forced many of the trafficking victims into prostitution through threats or actual violence. According to the indictment, they branded their prostitutes as if they were property - with tattoos of gang monikers, bar codes, or a pimp's name. Members of BMS sold, traded and gifted these girls and women among each other.

All of the 60 female sex trafficking victims, including 11 minors, were offered resources to help them start a new life.

U.S. Attorney Duffy urged parents and school administrators to be vigilant in tracking the online activities and academic performance of girls who could fall prey to gang members who would manipulate them.

According to court documents, some defendants attended parties known as "Players' Balls," which are invitation-only gatherings for pimps held in San Diego and around the country glorifying gang life, prostitution and pimping. One of the defendants in this indictment, Robert Banks, received an award at a national "Players' Ball" function.

After a "Players Ball" last month in Las Vegas, a photo was posted on Facebook of Banks posing with a "Pimp Cup" and a "Pimp stick" and a woman on each arm – including a known prostitute. According to court documents, it is common for pimps to have chalices and scepters, known as Pimp Cups and sticks, made to symbolize their status as a pimp. These items are typically worth thousands of dollars, as they are commonly made of gold, decorated with jewels, and designed with the pimp's moniker, gang name or gang number.

Pimps often have dental "grills" made that can be permanently affixed or removable. Typically, they are made of gold and can cost thousands of dollars.

According to the indictment, the government is seeking forfeiture of these items and others purchased with illicit proceeds generated from the enterprise's alleged criminal activities.

During today's searches, law enforcement officials seized two firearms; 20 to 30 marijuana plants; six luxury cars; flat screen televisions; several thousand dollars in cash; numerous pimp paraphernalia such as cups, sticks and hats; more than 50 pairs of Air Jordan shoes.

DEFENDANTS**Criminal Case No. 13CR4510-JAH**

Aaron Dwayne Pittman
Alvin Bernard Mitchell
Robert Banks III
Hakeem Tayari Dunn
Marcus Anthony Stevenson
Labarron Carnell Coker
Malik Hassan Kelly
Harold Randolph Martin
Anthony Dwayne Edmond
Tony Brown
Jakari Deandrez Blake
Dante Levell Grant*
Ronald Ledon Jackson*
Jonathan Devon Price
Bradley West Reynolds
Akili Lynn Cobb
Antwon Ruason Hollingsworth*
Christopher Michael Wall
Everett Burdette Williams
Marcus John Anthony Griffin
Edward Reynolds
Nicole Lee Rice
Yasenia Armentaro
Nadine Davis

*Fugitive

**The following defendants face the possibility of life in prison due to special allegations in the indictment, which increase the maximum penalty: Tony Brown, Robert Banks, Hakeem Dun, Everette Williams, Dante Grant, Chris Wall, Aaron Pittman, Nicole Rice, Malik Kelly, Harold Martin, Ronal Jackson, Marcus Stevenson, Alvin Mitchell, Labarren Coker. The special allegations are that these defendants committed conduct that formed the basis of (1) sex trafficking of a minor, (2) sex trafficking by force, or (3) transportation of minors for prostitution.

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Title 18, United States Code, Section 1962(d)—Conspiracy to Conduct Enterprise Affairs Through a Pattern of Racketeering Activity; Title 18, United States Code, Section 1963—Criminal Forfeiture. Maximum Penalties: 20 years' incarceration, a fine of \$250,000, three years of supervised release.

INVESTIGATING AGENCIES

San Diego Police Department

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Homeland Security Investigations

*An indictment itself is not evidence that the defendants committed the crimes charged. The defendants are presumed innocent until the government meets its burden in court of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.