



# Department of Justice

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Middle District of Florida

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## SEMI-SUBMERSIBLE VESSEL CREW SENTENCED

Tampa, Florida - U.S. Attorney A. Brian Albritton announces that U.S. District Judge Virginia M. Hernandez Covington today sentenced Silvio Orejuela Ceron (age 53, of Colombia) to fourteen years in federal prison for operating a self-propelled semi-submersible (SPSS) vessel loaded with approximately five tons of cocaine. Ceron had pleaded guilty to a Superseding Indictment charging him with conspiring to operate and operating an SPSS vessel with intent to evade detection and two drug counts. His sentence arises in part from a prior felony drug conviction in the United States.

Judge Covington also today sentenced Ceron's co-defendants, Adolfo Obregon (age 52, of Colombia), and Ricardo Victoria (age 40 of Colombia), to eleven years and three months each on related charges. A fourth co-defendant, Eladio Angulo (age 40, of Colombia), had previously been sentenced to five years and ten months. Obregon, Victoria, and Angulo had pleaded guilty earlier this year.

The charges against Ceron and his co-defendants were brought pursuant to the Drug Trafficking Vessel Interdiction Act of 2008, which was signed into law last October in response to the sharp increase in South American narcotics traffickers' deployment of SPSS vessels to smuggle cocaine.

According to court documents, on February 28, 2009, USS UNDERWOOD sighted an SPSS vessel stopped dead in the water northwest of Isla Gorgona, Colombia, in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. The vessel was 60 feet long, sloped on both ends, and painted blue, with an extremely low profile and no lights. It flew no flag, displayed no home/hailing port, and did not have any registration numbers.

USS UNDERWOOD launched a Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) to intercept the SPSS vessel. By the time the LEDET reached the vessel, the defendants had scuttled it by opening valves used to cool the engine with sea water. A cooperating witness later reported that the forward half of the SPSS vessel had been nearly entirely loaded with bales containing cocaine.

This is the second time Ceron has been interdicted in the Pacific Ocean and prosecuted in the Middle District of Florida for drug smuggling. According to court documents, on December 18, 2000, USS MCCLUSKEY caught Ceron and six others on a stateless "go-fast" vessel carrying 737 kilograms of cocaine. Ceron served seventy months in federal prison for that offense before being deported to Colombia.

This case was investigated by OCDETF's Panama Express Strike Force, comprised of agents and analysts from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Administration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, United States Coast Guard Investigative Service, and Joint Interagency Task Force South. It was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Christopher F. Murray.