



# Department of Justice

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Middle District of Florida

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## **WORLDWIDE COCAINE TRAFFICKER PLEADS GUILTY AND AGREES TO FORFEIT MILLIONS**

Tampa - United States Attorney A. Brian Albritton, in conjunction with the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida, announces that Fabio Enrique Ochoa-Vasco (age 48, of Colombia, South America) today pleaded guilty to drug trafficking charges in three federal cases. Ochoa-Vasco faces a minimum mandatory sentence of 10 years, with a maximum penalty of life, in federal prison.

In 1989 and 1990, Ochoa-Vasco was indicted in two separate drug trafficking cases in the Southern District of Florida, Miami. In 2004, a grand jury in the Middle District of Florida indicted Ochoa-Vasco in a third drug trafficking case, charging him and twelve other defendants with distributing more than 5 metric tons of cocaine. Ochoa-Vasco remained a fugitive on all three indictments until the United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida negotiated his surrender in January 2009. Prior to that time, a \$5 million reward had been offered for his capture (see attached Wanted Poster), and he was alleged to be one of the largest cocaine traffickers in the world.

According to the plea agreement filed in the Middle District of Florida, Ochoa-Vasco has been a cocaine trafficker since 1978 and became the leader of his own world-wide cocaine trafficking organization in 1986. Thereafter, he conspired with others to import

multi-ton quantities of cocaine into the United States through Mexico and other countries. Ochoa-Vasco's drug trafficking organization operated and distributed the cocaine through a vast network of "go fast" and fishing vessels, as well as airplanes and ground transportation vehicles. According to court documents, Ochoa-Vasco used airplanes to fly cocaine into the Bahamas and then used speed boats to transport the cocaine into the Florida Keys and other places.

In the plea agreement, Ochoa-Vasco agrees to forfeit in more than \$15 million in cash, property, and assets that he and others acquired during their cocaine trafficking operations.

United States Attorney A. Brian Albritton stated, "The successful prosecution and conviction of Ochoa-Vasco evidences the resolve of the United States to seek out drug kingpins and dismantle their cocaine trafficking organizations from the top down. The pursuit of Ochoa-Vasco spanned nearly two decades and sends a message to drug trafficking organizations that their leaders cannot insulate themselves from prosecution because the United States will not stop its pursuit until the very heads of the organization are put in prison."

This case was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). It is part of Operation Panama Express, a federally approved Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force investigating maritime cocaine smuggling organizations operating out of Colombia, South America. The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Matthew H. Perry.

**Release Instructions: Mark box where appropriate**

For Immediate Release

Release on at

Release only upon notification by AUSA (The guilty pleas are set for 3:00 p.m. before

Judge Mccoun today).