



# Department of Justice

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## **DEA'S HIGHEST RANKING GUATEMALAN DRUG TRAFFICKER INDICTED AND ARRESTED IN GUATEMALA ON FEDERAL DRUG CHARGES**

Tampa, Florida - United States Attorney Robert E. O'Neill announces the unsealing of an indictment charging Juan Alberto Ortiz-Lopez, a/k/a "Chamale," a/k/a "Juanito," (41, San Marcos, Guatemala) with federal drug trafficking offenses. If convicted, Ortiz-Lopez faces a maximum penalty of life in federal prison. The indictment also notifies Ortiz-Lopez that the United States intends to forfeit any and all properties, which are alleged to be traceable to proceeds of the offense. Ortiz-Lopez was arrested today by Guatemalan authorities in concert with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) on a provisional arrest warrant that was based on a federal arrest warrant issued in Tampa, Florida.

Ortiz-Lopez's indictment was obtained following a long-term investigation by the Operation Panama Express Task Force, which is a multi-agency task force targeting large scale drug trafficking organizations involved in smuggling shipments of narcotics into the United States. Ortiz-Lopez was designated under the Department of Justice's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) program as a Consolidated Priority Organization Target (CPOT), and was considered by the DEA to be the highest ranking drug trafficker currently operating in Guatemala. For over a decade, Ortiz-Lopez's drug organization received multi-ton cocaine shipments in Guatemala, which would then be

transported through Mexico to the United States, where the cocaine would be further distributed.

Count one of the indictment charges Ortiz-Lopez with conspiring with other persons, including persons who were on board a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States and who were first brought into the United States at a point in the Middle District of Florida, to possess with the intent to distribute and distribute 5 kilograms or more of cocaine. Count two charges Ortiz-Lopez with conspiring with other persons to distribute 5 kilograms or more of cocaine, knowing and intending that such substance would be unlawfully imported into the United States.

In a related investigation, on October 2, 2010, Guatemalan authorities and the DEA in Guatemala arrested Mauro Solomon Ramirez-Barrios, who was the leader of one of Ortiz-Lopez's principal maritime transportation organizations. In connection with attempts to apprehend Ramirez-Barrios in Guatemala City on September 15, 2010, a shootout took place at the Tikal Futura shopping center where two Guatemalan law enforcement officers and a civilian were killed. Documents submitted to the Government of Guatemala in connection with the United States' request to extradite Ramirez-Barrios detail his role in the maritime transportation of numerous multi-ton shipments of cocaine from South America to Guatemala, where the cocaine would be picked up on the high seas by members of Ramirez-Barrios' organization and then smuggled into Guatemala. Ramirez-Barrios is currently incarcerated in Guatemala and is pending extradition to the United States to face criminal charges.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.

This case was investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), including DEA's Guatemala City Country Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the United States Coast Guard Investigative Services (USCGIS), the Joint Interagency Task Force - South (JIATF-S), and the United States Marshals Service (USMS), with the assistance of the Government of Guatemala and Guatemalan law enforcement agencies. It will be prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney W. Stephen Muldrow.