

NEWS

United States Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney, District of New Jersey
401 Market Street, Fourth Floor
Camden, New Jersey 08101



Paul J. Fishman, U.S. Attorney

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Assistant U.S. Attorneys:

DIANA V. CARRIG

HOWARD WIENER

856-968-4927 and 856-968-4926, respectively

rive1119.rel

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Camden Man Convicted of Committing Murder, Attempted
Murder of a Witness and Cocaine Distribution Conspiracy

(More)

Greg Reinert, PAO
Public Affairs Office

856-757-5233
973-645-2888

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CAMDEN – A violent Camden drug gang enforcer was convicted today of all counts against him in connection with a major powder and crack cocaine distribution conspiracy, including charges of murder in the furtherance of the drug conspiracy and attempted murder of a witness regarding that murder, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

On the eighth day of deliberations, which began Nov. 10, the jury convicted Juan Rivera-Velez, 32, a.k.a. “Junito,” and “Two-Face,” of all four counts contained in a Superseding Indictment, which was returned Nov. 1, 2006. Rivera-Velez was convicted of one count each of murder in furtherance of a conspiracy to distribute powder and crack cocaine; witness tampering through the attempted murder of a witness; conspiracy to distribute cocaine and crack cocaine; and use of a firearm in relation to witness tampering.

The case was tried by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Diana V. Carrig and Howard Wiener.

The Indictment charged that from 1993 through April 2003, Rivera-Velez conspired with Raymond Morales and others to distribute cocaine and crack cocaine in the Camden area and to protect Morales’s continuing criminal enterprise (“CCE”) through the use of threats and violence, including murder.

In convicting Rivera-Velez, the jury found that during and in relation to the drug trafficking conspiracy, the defendant used a handgun to deliberately and with premeditation shoot and kill Miguel Batista, of Camden, on Sept. 26, 1996. The jury also found that on April 5, 2003, Rivera-Velez attempted to kill Rafael Colon-Rodriguez, of Camden, by shooting him in the head, with the intent to prevent Colon-Rodriguez from communicating with law enforcement and possibly providing testimony in court regarding the drug-related murder of Miguel Batista. Colon-Rodriguez survived the attempt on his life and testified at Rivera-Velez’s trial.

“Today’s conviction of the final charged member of Raymond Morales’s violent street gang demonstrates the successes that a united law enforcement community can achieve to curb violence and improve Camden neighborhoods,” said Fishman.

Gerard P. McAleer, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA New Jersey Division stated, “This displays the commitment we have within the law enforcement community to hold those responsible for the heinous crimes that they commit in New Jersey.”

“We’re pleased with the result and pleased to have the opportunity to cooperate with federal authorities and the U.S. Attorney’s Office in a prosecution that led to a dangerous man’s removal from society,” said Camden County Prosecutor Warren W. Faulk.

On May 31, 2007, law enforcement officials acknowledged for the first time that Camden drug leader Raymond Morales had pleaded guilty in July 2005 and admitted at that time that he contracted out six murders and the attempted murder of a witness. Since before the guilty plea, Morales, 37, of Camden, had been cooperating with federal law enforcement authorities. Morales, who was the leader of a multi-million dollar drug-trafficking

organization, pleaded guilty to a nine-count Superseding Information, which was unsealed on May 9, 2007, that charged him with six counts of ordering a murder in the furtherance of a CCE; one count of witness tampering by ordering the attempted murder of a witness; one count of distribution and possession with intent to distribute over 500 grams of cocaine; and one count of being a principal administrator of a CCE that operated in Camden from 1993 until 2003.

Rivera-Velez's conviction concludes a seven-year joint federal, state and local law enforcement investigation into Morales's CCE, which resulted in the conviction or guilty plea of 24 defendants on federal charges and an additional 35 suspects on state charges.

The charge in Count One, conspiracy to distribute cocaine and crack cocaine, carries a mandatory minimum prison term of 10 years and a maximum statutory penalty of life in prison and a \$4 million fine. Count Two, charging murder in furtherance of the Count One conspiracy, carries a prison sentence of up to life. Count Three, which charges attempted murder to tamper with a witness, carries a statutory maximum prison term of 20 years. The charge in Count Four, use of a firearm in relation to witness tampering, carries a mandatory minimum prison term of 10 years and maximum prison term of life, which must be served consecutive to any other sentence.

In determining an actual sentence, U.S. District Judge Joseph E. Irenas, who presided over the seven-week trial, will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Fishman credited the Special Agents of the DEA, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gerard P. McAleer in Newark, Investigators with the Camden County Prosecutor's Office Homicide Unit, under the direction of Camden County Prosecutor Warren W. Faulk, and Investigators with the member agencies of the Philadelphia/Camden HIDTA Task Force, with developing the investigation which resulted in today's guilty verdict.

The Government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Diana V. Carrig and Howard Wiener of the Criminal Division in Camden.

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Defense Attorney: Harold Shapiro, Esq. Vineland