

Operation Patria—Trinitarios Takedown
Prepared Remarks for U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara
December 12, 2012

Good afternoon. My name is Preet Bharara, and I am the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York.

Today we unseal a superseding indictment that chronicles a level of gang violence not seen in this District for some time. The indictment describes a highly-organized criminal machine that ruthlessly guarded its turf, blithely murdered its rivals, and brutally punished even its own members for any transgression of arbitrary gang rules.

As alleged, that criminal machine – the Trinitarios Gang based in the Bronx – went to war against competing gangs and turned portions of New York City into a virtual shooting gallery. The catalogue of crimes alleged is stunning: nine murders, 24 attempted murders, racketeering, robbery, assault, firearms offenses, trafficking in crack cocaine, powder cocaine, illegal prescription drugs, and marijuana - you name it, they did it.

Today's indictment is actually the second in this case. The first indictment, unsealed almost exactly a year ago (on December 7, 2011) charged 50 members and associates of the Bronx Trinitarios with racketeering, narcotics, and firearms offenses. More than half of those defendants have already pled guilty.

But our work was not done, and that brings us to today.

The new indictment charges 14 of the original defendants with more serious crimes and 26 new defendants. So, 40 in total were charged today, and 50 were charged in the first indictment. That's 76 total Bronx Trinitarios charged altogether, and 119 total Bronx and Manhattan Trinitarios charged since 2009.

Early this morning more than 200 agents and officers swept through the City to effect the arrests, and now 18 of the newly-charged 26 are in custody – 13 from the street; 5 on writ; 5 at large; 3 in the Dominican Republic.

As I mentioned and as the indictment describes, the bulk of the violence by the Trinitarios was aimed at rival gangs including: The Bloods, The Crips, the Latin Kings, and gangs known as Dominicans Don't Play and the FOBs. As you might expect, when a neighborhood becomes a war zone, innocents get caught in the crossfire, as happened here.

As alleged, the Trinitarios Gang was highly organized, with a strong leadership structure. The lead defendant is Leonides Sierra, who is accused of being the national leader of the Gang and actually directing its violent operations for a time from inside Attica Prison.

As alleged, under Sierra, the Trinitarios enforced its own rules with brutality and ruthlessness. In one episode described in the indictment, Sierra ordered the murder of one of his gang's own members simply because he was believed to be homosexual. That apparently was a violation of the Trinitarios "code," and a capital offense.

Most of the time, however, the Trinitarios directed their brutality against rival gang members, and as described, played out scene after scene of young men being executed in the street.

As I said, the indictment charges 9 murders and 24 attempted murders between 2004 and 2011. Of the 9 murder victims, five were teenagers: Raffy Tavarez, Irving Cruz, and Freddy Polanco were all murdered in 2010. They were each just 19. Issi Dominguez was murdered in 2009. He was 17. And Ka'Shawn Phillips was murdered in 2005. He was just 16.

When gangs proliferate, neighborhoods suffer, communities disintegrate, and children die. Unless you like jail or death, there is no reason to have anything to do with these gangs.

Today's charges remind us that the Gangs of New York are alive and well, but that we are dedicated to extinguishing them one by one. With today's takedown, the Trinitarios may not yet be extinct, but they are without question an endangered species.

And if you just look at the array of law enforcement agencies assembled here today, you know that we are absolutely committed to this cause – because no one here wants to allow even one small step backward to the gang wars of the 1990s, and no one here wants our city to end up like some others that have recently seen startling spikes in violence, because gangs have gone unchecked.

That will not happen in New York City.

Now let me end by acknowledging and thanking the members of the following law enforcement agencies that helped to take down the Trinitarios Gang:

From the NYPD, represented by Commissioner Ray Kelly, I would like to thank Chief Anthony Izzo of the Organized Crime Control Bureau; Chief Theresa Shortell, Commanding Officer of the Gang Division; Captain James Kenny and Lt. Keith Coughlan of the Bronx Gang squad, and NYPD Detectives Paul Jeselson, John Urena, and Peter Alfonso

The DEA, represented by Brian Crowell, Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Field Division, Will Plummer, Associate Special Agent-in Charge; and DEA Special Agent William Melodick,

The ATF, represented by Special Agent-in-Charge Joseph Anarumo; ATF Special Agent Andrew Daher,

ICE's Homeland Security Investigations, represented by Anthony Scandiffio, Deputy Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Office. ICE/HSI's Supervisory Special Agent, Joseph Lestrangle and Agent Christopher DiGregorio

I also want to thank Joe Guccione, the U. S. Marshal and his team; the New York State Department of Correctional Services; and the officers and detectives of the City of Yonkers Police Department.

Finally, I want to thank the dedicated career prosecutors in my office for their consistently outstanding work in doggedly prosecuting these cases. They are: Assistant U.S. Attorneys Nola Heller, Jessica Ortiz, Rachel Maimin, and Sarah Krissoff, led by: Margaret Garnett and Todd Blanche, Chiefs of this Office's Violent Crimes Unit.