



PRESS NOTICE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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14 INDICTED IN S.C. AS PART OF NATIONAL DRUG SMUGGLING CASE
“Project Coronado” Yields 1,200 Arrests Nationwide

Columbia, South Carolina ---- United States Attorney W. Walter Wilkins and Rodney G. Benson, Special Agent in Charge of the Atlanta Field Division of the Drug Enforcement Administration, announced today that 14 people were indicted for conspiring to distribute illegal drugs in South Carolina. The case is part of Project Coronado, a coordinated, nationwide operation targeting the La Familia Cartel announced earlier today by United States Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr. The La Familia Cartel, based in Michoacan, Mexico, is suspected of importing and distributing crystal methamphetamine and cocaine throughout the United States. The 44-month investigation has resulted in 1,200 arrests across the country, with

303 individuals arrested in a sweep that began yesterday. During the two-day operation alone, \$3.4million in cash, 109 vehicles, and 144 weapons were seized, along with 729 pounds of methamphetamine, 62 kilograms of cocaine, and 967 pounds of marijuana.

Indicted in the South Carolina case are:

ARMANDO RAMIREZ, age 34, of Ladson;

RAMIRO SANCHEZ-GAYTAN, age 28, of Ladson;

ORLANDO SANCHEZ-RAMIREZ, age 22, of Ladson;

ROSARIO REYES, age 31, of Ladson;

FRANCISCO SERRANO, age 33, of Summerville;

JUAN MELO-REYES, age 35, of Summerville;

RUFINO SANTO LOPEZ, age unknown, of North Charleston;

JUAN CARLOS RAMIREZ, age 28, of North Charleston;

CHARLES WILLARD ROBERTS, age 64, of Moncks Corner;

ROSENDO TORRES, age 51, of Los Angeles, California;

MARTINA ESPINOZA-RAMIREZ, age 32, of Atlanta;

DOMINGO JAIMES, age 45, of Atlanta; and

CAMILO FERREL HERNANDEZ, age 29, of Atlanta.

The 13 named individuals were charged in a seven-count Superseding Indictment with conspiring to possess with intent to distribute and distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine, five grams or more of cocaine base, 50 grams or more of methamphetamine, and 500 grams or more of a mixture containing

methamphetamine, all in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 846, as well as possessing with intent to distribute and distributing cocaine, methamphetamine, and crack cocaine, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 841. A 14th female was also indicted in the case, but her identity has not yet been determined.

Appearing in federal court in Charleston this morning were defendants Ramiro Sanchez-Gaytan, Orlando Sanchez-Ramirez, Rosario Reyes, Juan Melo-Reyes, and Charles Willard Roberts. United States Magistrate Judge Robert S. Carr ordered that these defendants remain in custody until a detention hearing is held next Tuesday, October 27th. Armando Ramirez and Francisco Serrano were apprehended in Kansas City, and were detained to be transported back to South Carolina. Domingo Jaimes and Camilio Ferrel Hernandez are currently incarcerated in Atlanta and will likewise be brought to South Carolina to face the charges against them. Agents are continuing to locate the remaining defendants.

Mr. Wilkins stated, "These charges are a direct result of the combined efforts of the federal, state, and local agents serving on the Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force herein South Carolina. These dedicated agents are committed to identifying and dismantling drug smuggling operations that seek to do business here. I want to thank each law enforcement agency that supported the Task Force in this investigation, and to commend the agents that worked tirelessly to bring these defendants to face justice."

Special Agent Benson stated, "Today through Project Coronado we have

impacted La Familia Michoacana, a violent poly-drug organization with cells located throughout the United States. These arrests and indictments reflect a coordinated effort by local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies joining together to target and dismantle this organization responsible for distributing cocaine and methamphetamine into our streets.”

The maximum penalty each defendant faces is life imprisonment and a fine of \$4 million dollars.

Mr. Wilkins stated that the case was investigated by agents of the Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force which consists of members from the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Berkeley County Sheriff’s Office, the Charleston County Sheriff’s Office, the Charleston Police Department, the Dorchester County Sheriff’s Office, the Georgetown County Sheriff’s Office, the North Charleston Police Department, the South Carolina Highway Patrol, and the Summerville Police Department. This case is assigned to Assistant United States Attorney Peter Phillips of the Charleston office for prosecution.

The United States Attorney stated that all charges in this Superseding Indictment are merely accusations and that all defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

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