



Department of Justice

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MORE THAN 300 ALLEGED LA FAMILIA CARTEL MEMBERS AND ASSOCIATES ARRESTED IN TWO-DAY NATIONWIDE TAKEDOWN

*“Project Coronado” Results in Nearly 1,200 Arrests during 44-Month Operation,
Seizures of Approximately 11.7 Tons of Drugs and \$32.8 Million in U.S. Currency*

WASHINGTON – Today Attorney General Eric Holder announced the arrest of nearly 1,200 individuals on narcotics-related charges and the seizure of more than 11.7 tons of narcotics as part of a 44-month multi-agency law enforcement investigation known as “Project Coronado.” The Attorney General was joined in announcing the current results of Project Coronado by DEA Acting Administrator Michele M. Leonhart, FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III and ATF Acting Director Kenneth E. Melson.

Over the past two days, 303 individuals in 19 states were arrested as part of Project Coronado, which targeted the distribution network of a major Mexican drug trafficking organization known as La Familia, through coordination between federal, state and local law enforcement. More than 3,000 agents and officers operated across the United States to make the arrests during the two-day takedown. During the two-day operation alone, \$3.4 million in U.S. currency, 729 pounds of methamphetamine, 62 kilograms of cocaine, 967 pounds of marijuana, 144 weapons and 109 vehicles were seized by law enforcement agents.

“This unprecedented, coordinated U.S. law enforcement action - the largest ever undertaken against a Mexican drug cartel - has dealt a significant blow to La Familia’s supply chain of illegal drugs, weapons and cash flowing between Mexico and the United States,” said Attorney General Holder. “We will not allow these cartels to operate unfettered in our country, and with the increases in cooperation between U.S. and Mexican authorities in recent years, we are taking the fight to our adversaries. We will continue to stand strong with our partners in Mexico as we work to disrupt and dismantle cartel operations on both sides of the border.”

The La Familia cartel is a violent drug trafficking cartel based in the state of Michoacan, in southwestern Mexico. According to court documents, La Familia controls drug manufacturing and distribution in and around Michoacan, including the importation of vast quantities of cocaine and methamphetamine from Mexico into the United States. La Familia is philosophically opposed to the sale of methamphetamine to Mexicans, and instead supports its export to the United States for consumption by Americans. La Familia is a heavily armed cartel that has utilized violence to support its narcotics trafficking business including murders, kidnappings and assaults. According to one indictment unsealed in the Southern District of New York, associates

of La Familia based in the United States have allegedly acquired military-grade weapons, including assault weapons and ammunition, and have arranged for them to be smuggled back into Mexico for use by La Familia. In a criminal complaint filed in Dallas, ATF investigators allege that operatives of La Familia shipped hundreds of firearms from the U.S. to Mexico over a 12-month period ending in October 2009. Individuals indicted in the cases are charged with a variety of crimes, including: conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana; distribution of methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana; conspiracy to import narcotics into the United States; money laundering; and other violations of federal law. Numerous defendants face forfeiture allegations as well.

To date, Project Coronado has led to the arrest of 1,186 individuals and the seizure of approximately \$32.8 million in U.S. currency, and approximately 2,710 pounds of methamphetamine, 1,999 kilograms of cocaine, 29 pounds of heroin, 16,390 pounds of marijuana, 389 weapons and 269 vehicles.

“Project Coronado, our massive assault on the *La Familia Cartel*, is part of our continued fight against all of the powerful Mexico-based drug cartels,” said DEA Acting Administrator Michele M. Leonhart. “This organization, the newest of Mexican cartels, is directly responsible for a vast majority of the methamphetamine pouring into our country across our Southwest Border, and has had a hand in fueling the cycle of violence that is wracking Mexico today. DEA, along with our U.S. and Mexican partners, are committed to strategically attacking the international and domestic drug trade with every tool at our disposal, and defeating those that thrive on the suffering of others.”

“Intelligence-driven investigations such as Project Coronado are the key to disrupting the operations of complex criminal organizations like La Familia. Together – with the strong collaboration of our international, federal, state and local partners – we have dealt a substantial blow to a group that has polluted our neighborhoods with illicit drugs and has terrorized Mexico with unimaginable violence,” said Director Mueller.

“ATF’s arrest of defendants in Project Coronado highlight the almost inseparable link between illegal trafficking of firearms and narcotics between the U.S. and Mexico,” said ATF Acting Director Kenneth Melson. “ATF is on the frontline against violent crime and focuses its investigative tools on criminal groups such as La Familia, which use firearms to further their illegal trade and ruin and endanger countless lives. It is alleged that La Familia used proceeds from the sale of drugs to purchase or obtain hundreds of firearms that were then moved illicitly to Mexico.”

“The operation to dismantle the La Familia drug trafficking organization in the United States demonstrates an unprecedented level of partnership and coordination at the local, state and federal levels. We at ICE are proud to have played an important role in yesterday’s operation and look forward to continuing to work with our law enforcement partners to target these criminal organizations,” said Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Assistant Secretary John Morton.

Arrests were made or charges have been unsealed yesterday and today related to Project Coronado in the following districts: Central District of California, Southern District of California, District of Colorado, Northern District of Georgia, District of Massachusetts, District of Minnesota, Southern District of Mississippi, Eastern District of Missouri, Northern District of Oklahoma, Southern District of New York, Northern District of New York, Middle District of North Carolina, District of South Carolina, Middle District of Tennessee, Eastern District of Texas, Northern District of Texas, Western District of Texas and the Western District of Washington. There were also arrests by state authorities in California, Nevada, North Carolina and Georgia. Assistance for Project Coronado was provided by the Criminal Division's Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section and Office of International Affairs. Additionally, local prosecutions will occur in San Diego, San Bernardino, Los Angeles and Orange County, Calif.; Clark County, Nev.; Gwinnett County, Ga.; and Pitt County, N.C.

The investigative efforts in Project Coronado were coordinated by the multi-agency Special Operations Division, comprised of agents and analysts from the DEA, FBI, ICE, Internal Revenue Service, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Marshals Service and ATF, as well as attorneys from the Criminal Division's Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section. More than 300 federal, state, local and foreign law enforcement agencies contributed investigative and prosecutorial resources to Project Coronado through the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces.

An indictment is merely an allegation and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is entitled to a fair trial in which it will be the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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