



U.S. Department of Justice

PAUL A. MURPHY
Acting United States Attorney
District of the Virgin Islands

Federal Building & United States Courthouse
5500 Veterans Drive, Suite 260
Charlotte Amalie
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00802-6424
Voice: (340) 774-5757
Fax: (340) 776-3474

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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

ST. CROIX MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO
TRAVELING WITH INTENT TO HAVE SEX WITH MINOR

A St. Croix man pleaded guilty yesterday in federal court on St. Croix to traveling with intent to have sex with a minor, Acting United States Attorney Paul A. Murphy and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Special Agent-in-Charge Manuel Oyola-Torres announced.

Victor Cancel, 44, of La Grande Princess was indicted on December 18, 2008 on charges of traveling with intent to have sex with a minor and engaging in sex with a minor in a foreign country. According to the indictment, on or about September 27, 2008, Cancel, who is a United States citizen, knowingly traveled in foreign commerce from St. Croix to the Dominican Republic for the purpose of engaging in illicit sexual conduct with an individual under the age of 18.

The charges were developed after Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents received a tip from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that Cancel would be traveling to the Dominican Republic in September 2008 to have sex with a minor. In his guilty plea, Cancel admitted that on September 27, 2008, he traveled to the Dominican Republic from St. Croix to meet a 14-year-old girl for the purpose of engaging in illicit sexual activity. Cancel further admitted that while in the Dominican Republic, he gave the minor girl money and gifts, and that he engaged in illicit sexual conduct with her several times during his stay there. Cancel used his cell phone to take photographs of some of the illicit sexual conduct with the minor.

On October 7, 2008, Cancel was arrested in Puerto Rico as he was traveling back to St. Croix from the Dominican Republic. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and ICE agents in Puerto Rico discovered images of Cancel and a minor female engaging in illicit sexual conduct on Cancel's cell phone.

On January 7, 2009, Cancel also pleaded guilty in District Court in Puerto Rico to producing child pornography in connection with his photographing the illicit sexual conduct with the minor female on his cell phone. The mandatory minimum penalty for that offense is 15 years in prison.

The maximum penalty for traveling with the intent to have sex with a minor, the St. Croix offense for which Cancel has pleaded guilty in the District of the Virgin Islands, is 30 years imprisonment, and a \$250,000 fine.

Cancel has been detained since his October 7, 2008 arrest. He is scheduled to be sentenced in April 2009 in the Virgin Islands case. A sentencing date has not been set in the Puerto Rico case.

This case was investigated by ICE as part of its "Operation Predator," a nationwide initiative to protect children from sexual predators, including those who travel across continents to have sex with minors. Since the initiative was launched in July 2003, there have been more than 11,500 individuals arrested nationwide. "All children have an absolute right to grow up free from the fear of sexual exploitation," said Special Agent-in-Charge Manuel Oyola-Torres. "ICE relentlessly pursues predators who sexually abuse children, whether that abuse is physical in nature or accomplished by exploiting their images. Our agents will continue investigating these crimes and bring to justice those individuals who exploit the most vulnerable in our society, our children."

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative

designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. Led by the U.S. Attorneys Offices, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov/.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Denise Hinds.