



## U.S. Customs Service

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# NEWS

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **45 CHILDREN RESCUED, 20 ARRESTS IN U.S. CUSTOMS, DANISH POLICE INVESTIGATION OF GLOBAL CHILD- MOLESTING, PORNOGRAPHY RING**

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Commissioner of Customs Robert C. Bonner today announced the execution of 15 U.S. search warrants and the arrests of 10 U.S. citizens in **Operation Hamlet**, a global investigation into a ring of pedophiles who sexually molested children and distributed child pornography over the Internet. To date, 45 children worldwide, including 37 children in the U.S., have been rescued from this abuse. In many cases, parents were involved in the molestation of their own children.

Commissioner Bonner's announcement coincides with the indictment on August 8, 2002, of 15 of the suspects on federal conspiracy charges in the Eastern District of California. Five of those indicted are foreign nationals.

"I congratulate the investigators whose ingenuity and perseverance brought these people to justice," said Commissioner Bonner. "There is no duty that law enforcement officials take more seriously than protecting children from predators."

Since November 2001, the U.S. Customs CyberSmuggling Center, has been coordinating U.S. investigative efforts following a request for assistance from Danish National Police (DNP). The DNP had previously received information from an Internet watchdog group called "Save the Children" about photographs the group had discovered on the Internet depicting a man sexually abusing a young girl. The man and his wife were arrested by the DNP after investigators learned that they had posted images on the Internet of their nine-year-old daughter being molested. The images were shared over the Internet with individuals in other countries including the United States.

Working closely with the DNP, the U.S. Customs Attaché in Berlin, INTERPOL, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, officials from the Customs Cyber Smuggling Center were able to identify several individuals in the United States who were believed to be part of the ring. U.S. Customs identified suspects in several states including California, Idaho, Nevada, Florida, New York, Washington, New Jersey, Michigan, South Carolina, Illinois, and Texas.

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U.S. Customs agents along with other federal, state, and local law enforcement officials have undertaken the following enforcement actions as part of the investigation:

- ✍ January 26, 2002? U.S. Customs agents and officers from the Clovis Police Department in Fresno, California arrested suspect upon learning he had exchanged child pornography over the Internet with another couple involved in the ring. The suspect was subsequently charged with child molestation and other related violations.
- ? January 27, 2002? U.S. Customs agents in San Diego, California, along with members of the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (ICAC), arrested a child counselor, charged with child molestation and distribution of child pornography.
- ? February 15, 2002? An advertising salesman, was arrested in San Diego on charges of child molestation and distribution of child pornography.
- ? February 15, 2002? U.S. Customs agents and detectives from the Cassia County Sheriff's Office arrested a suspect from Burley, Idaho. The suspect allegedly operated a photography business that he utilized to produce child pornography.
- ? February 15, 2002? U.S. Customs agents in Reno, Nevada and detectives from the Reno Police Department executed a search warrant at the home of a suspect who committed suicide prior to the filing of formal charges on molesting several children.
- ? February 24, 2002? U.S. Customs agents in Dallas, Texas, assisted by the Harrison County Sheriff's Office and the Texas Department of Public Safety, arrested a suspect from Longview, Texas. The suspect was arrested on charges of sexual assault of a child under the age of 13.
- ? March 11, 2002? U.S. Customs agents in West Palm Beach, Florida, and detectives from the West Palm Beach Sheriff's Office arrested a suspect from Palm Beach Gardens on charges of child molestation and manufacture and distribution of child pornography.
- ? March 12, 2002? a federal arrest warrant was issued for suspect from Longview, Texas, on child pornography charges.
- ? March 13, 2002? U.S. Customs agents in Austin, Texas, arrested suspect from Killeen, Texas, for possession and receipt of child pornography. This suspect allegedly had asked a man and wife involved in the ring to send him images of child molestation while posing as a teenage girl over the Internet. On July 10, the suspect was sentenced to 20 years in prison.
- ? May 9, 2002? A suspect from Spokane, Washington was arrested on child sexual exploitation charges. The suspect entered a guilty plea on August 1.

Ten suspects have been arrested in Denmark, Belgium, Germany, England, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Additional arrests in the United States are anticipated.

U.S. Customs continues to be a global leader in the enforcement of laws aimed at protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse by pedophiles. U.S. Customs investigations have led to significant federal and state prison sentences for those found guilty of child exploitation violations, including the recent sentencing of Glenn Martikean, a member of the Blue Orchid Club dismantled by U.S. Customs and Moscow City Police in last year. Martikean received 20 years in prison after having been found guilty on a number of charges.

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