



# Department of Justice

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## **FORMER LEADER OF THE ARELLANO-FELIX ORGANIZATION PLEADS GUILTY**

San Diego, CA - Benjamin Arellano-Felix, the former leader of the Tijuana Cartel/Arellano-Felix Organization (AFO) entered a guilty plea in federal court in San Diego today, announced United States Attorney for the Southern District of California Laura E. Duffy. Arellano-Felix was extradited by the government of Mexico to the United States on April 29, 2011, to face charges in the Southern District of California for narcotics trafficking, money laundering and organized crime-related offenses. Long-reputed to be one of the most notorious multi-national drug trafficking organizations to ever exist, the AFO controlled the flow of cocaine, marijuana and other drugs through the Mexican border cities of Tijuana and Mexicali into the United States. Its operations also extended into southern Mexico and Colombia.

According to court records and the defendant's admissions at today's hearing, Arellano-Felix was the leader of the AFO from approximately 1986 to until his arrest in Mexico on March 9, 2002, on Mexican charges. During that time, Arellano-Felix served as the ultimate decision-maker for the AFO. Arellano-Felix admitted that he issued directives to other members of the AFO, including his brothers, Ramon, Eduardo, and Francisco Javier Arellano-Felix, as well as his top lieutenants and drug-trafficking partners.

"Arellano-Felix led the most violent criminal organization in this part of the world for two decades. Today's guilty plea marks the end of his reign of murder, mayhem and corruption, and his historic admission of guilt sends a clear message to the Mexican cartel leaders operating today: the United States will spare no effort to investigate, extradite, and prosecute you for your criminal activities," stated U.S. Attorney Laura Duffy.

The plea entered today represents the latest in a long line of convictions of the top leadership of the Arellano-Felix Organization, which have included, in part, Arturo Paez-Martinez in 2002, Ismael and Gilberto Higuera-Guerrero in 2007, Javier Arellano-Felix in 2007, and Jesus Labra-Aviles in 2010. U.S. Attorney Duffy noted that with the plea by Benjamin Arellano-Felix, "the AFO has been effectively dismantled and no longer poses the same threat to the people of the United States or Mexico."

U.S. Attorney Duffy thanked agents, prosecutors and Mexican officials for working diligently on both sides of the border to bring Benjamin Arellano-Felix to justice, adding that "as

a result, this nearly 60-year-old defendant, who began serving time in Mexico in March 2002, will likely spend his remaining years behind bars in the U.S., paying for his leadership role in the AFO.”

The plea today marks the end of the Arellano-Felix drug trafficking organization as we know it,” said William R. Sherman, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the DEA in San Diego. “DEA and our law enforcement partners, both domestic and international, have effectively dismantled this once powerful cartel from the top down.”

“Today’s guilty plea marks the end of one of the world’s most violent and notorious drug cartel leaders,” stated Special Agent in Charge Leslie DeMarco of the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation, Los Angeles Field Office. “IRS Criminal Investigators unraveled the complex, sophisticated money laundering schemes that allowed the United States government to dismantle this dangerous and deadly organization.”

According to the plea, Arellano-Felix and other AFO members conspired to import and distribute within the United States hundreds of tons of cocaine and marijuana, for which the AFO obtained hundreds of millions in U.S. dollars in profits. Arellano-Felix conspired with other members of the AFO to launder proceeds of the above drug trafficking activities by directing other members to transport, transmit, and transfer hundreds of millions in U.S. dollars from the United States to Mexico. At Arellano-Felix’s direction, members of the AFO kidnaped, physically restrained and murdered numerous persons in furtherance of the AFO’s illegal activities. Also at Arellano-Felix’s direction, members of the AFO bribed law enforcement and military personnel, and murdered informants and potential witnesses in order to obstruct or impede the official investigation of their activities.

The defendant entered his guilty pleas earlier today before United States District Judge Larry A. Burns; Judge Burns scheduled a sentencing hearing for April 2, 2012 at 9:30 a.m. In connection with his plea, Arellano-Felix will also forfeit \$100 million and the parties will jointly recommend that he be sentenced to serve 25 years in prison. Arellano-Felix has been in custody since his arrest in March 2002. At the time Arellano-Felix completes the sentence that will be imposed as a result of his guilty plea, he will be subject to removal to Mexico, where he faces the remainder of a 22-year sentence on the Mexican charges for which he has already been convicted.

This case was investigated by special agents from the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation and prosecuted in the Southern District of California by Assistant United States Attorneys Joseph Green, James Melendres, and Daniel Zipp. The Criminal Division’s Office of International Affairs provided significant assistance in the extradition.

The investigation was coordinated by an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF). The OCDETF program was created to consolidate and coordinate all law enforcement resources in this country’s battle against major drug trafficking rings, drug kingpins, and money launderers.

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