



# Department of Justice

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Southern District of California

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**LEADER OF THE ARELLANO-FELIX ORGANIZATION SENTENCED**  
**FOR RACKETEERING AND MONEY LAUNDERING OFFENSES**  
**\$100 Million Ordered Forfeited to the U.S.**

San Diego, CA - Benjamin Arellano-Felix, the former leader of the Tijuana Cartel/Arellano-Felix Organization (AFO) was sentenced today in U.S. District Court in San Diego by the Honorable Larry A. Burns to serve 25 years in federal prison, announced United States Attorney for the Southern District of California Laura E. Duffy. Judge Burns also ordered Arellano-Felix to forfeit \$100 million in criminal proceeds. The sentence followed Arellano-Felix's conviction for racketeering, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1962(c), and conspiring to launder monetary instruments, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 371.

"The Tijuana Cartel was one of the world's most brutal drug trafficking networks, but has now met its demise with leader Benjamin Arellano-Felix's sentencing today," said DEA Administrator Michele M. Leonhart. "It is a major victory for DEA and Mexico's Calderon Administration. Together, we will continue our pressure on the Mexican Cartels whose leaders, members and facilitators will be prosecuted and face the justice they fear."

"Today's prison sentence virtually ensures that Arellano-Felix will spend the remainder of his life in custody. Following this sentence, he will be deported to Mexico to finish a 22-year sentence. This is a fitting end for a person who has caused so much suffering and destruction," commented United States Attorney Duffy. Duffy heralded the sentence as a landmark achievement in the United States and Mexico's joint effort to dismantle drug cartels operating on both sides of the border and stated that "Attorney General Eric Holder and Mexican Attorney General Marisela Morales are pleased with today's result and that this defendant has finally been held accountable for his crimes. Today's sentence, together with what remains of his sentence in Mexico, will go a long way in ensuring that Arellano Felix spends his remaining years in prison."

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. Arellano-Felix was taken into custody by Mexican authorities on March 9, 2002. A final order of extradition to the United States was granted in 2007 and after years of unsuccessful appeals, Arellano-Felix arrived in the U.S. on April 29, 2011, to face charges in the Southern District of California for narcotics trafficking, money laundering and organized crime-related offenses. On January 4, 2012, he entered his guilty pleas before Judge Burns.

San Diego FBI Acting Special Agent in Charge Eric Birnbaum commented, "Today's sentencing marks the end of Mr. Arellano-Felix's reign as the leader of one of the most dangerous drug and organized crime organizations our agencies have ever investigated. While there is still much work to do, it is particularly noteworthy that this culmination would not have been possible without the cumulative efforts of law enforcement on both sides of the border. We are pleased to stand united against the violence brought forth by the AFO and see this individual brought to justice."

"The money laundering investigation conducted by IRS Special Agents contributed to the dismantling of one of the most notorious and violent drug cartels in Mexico," commented Leslie P. DeMarco, Special Agent in Charge of IRS Criminal Investigation Los Angeles Field Office. "Today's sentencing is further evidence of the successful partnership that IRS Criminal Investigation has with other law enforcement agencies by using our financial expertise to unravel the money laundering component of this multi-national drug-trafficking organization."

According to court records and the defendant's admissions, Arellano-Felix was the leader of the AFO from approximately 1986 to until his arrest on March 9, 2002. During that time, Arellano-Felix served as the ultimate decision-maker for the AFO. Arellano-Felix 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 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. 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. 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.

This case was investigated by agents from the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal 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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