

NEWS RELEASE



OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

San Diego, California

***United States Attorney
Laura E. Duffy***

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For Immediate Release

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - May 23, 2012

United States Attorney Laura E. Duffy announced that today Armando Villareal Heredia, aka Gordo Villareal, was successfully extradited from the Republic of Mexico to the United States to face federal racketeering (RICO) and drug charges in the Southern District of California. According to court documents, Villareal is the lead defendant in a 43-defendant racketeering prosecution against the Fernando Sanchez-Arellano Organization ("FSO") which has been ongoing in the Southern District of California since July 2010. Villareal was arrested by Mexican law enforcement officers on July 9, 2011, at the request of the United States. Since his arrest in Mexico, Villareal has remained in custody pending extradition to the United States. According to the indictment, Villareal was one of the top leaders of this criminal organization, which evolved from the now-defunct Arellano-Felix Organization and is headed by the nephew of Benjamin and Javier Arellano-Felix.

"Today's extradition of Villareal, a top-lieutenant in the FSO who answered directly to Fernando Sanchez Arellano, highlights our continued successful efforts to work with the Government of Mexico to combat organized criminal activity along the southwest border," United States Attorney Duffy stated.

To date, 38 defendants have entered guilty pleas in the case. During those guilty pleas, the defendants admitted to participating in a violent transnational racketeering enterprise controlled by Fernando Sanchez-Arellano, and to committing murders, kidnappings, robberies, assaults, money laundering and a wide range of drug trafficking offenses. Four defendants are fugitives and the only other remaining in-custody defendant is scheduled for trial on June 5, 2012.

The indictment in this case resulted from a long-term investigation conducted by the multi-agency San Diego Cross Border Violence Task Force (CBVTF). The CBVTF was formed to target those individuals involved in organized crime-related violent activities affecting both the United States and Mexico. Law enforcement personnel assigned to the CBVTF made extensive use of court-authorized wiretaps and other sophisticated investigative techniques to develop the significant evidence which led to the charges in this case.

United States Attorney Duffy praised the Mexican government for their assistance in the extradition of Villareal. She also commended the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) for the coordinated team effort in handling this investigation, “Operation Luz Verde.” Agents and officers from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, San Diego Police Department, Drug Enforcement Administration, San Diego Sheriff’s Office, Chula Vista Police Department, U.S. Marshals Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, San Diego District Attorney’s Office, and California Department of Justice participated in this OCDETF investigation. The Criminal Division’s Office of International Affairs provided significant assistance in the extradition. The OCDETF program was created to consolidate and utilize all law enforcement resources in this country’s battle against organized crime and major drug trafficking organizations.

The defendant is expected to be in federal court in San Diego tomorrow, May 24, 2012, at 10:30 a.m., before United States Magistrate Judge Nita L. Stormes.

DEFENDANT

Case Number 10CR3044-WQH

Armando Villareal Heredia, aka Gordo Villareal

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Title 18, United States Code, Section 1962(d) - Conspiracy to Conduct Enterprise Affairs Through a Pattern of Racketeering Activity

Maximum penalties: Life in prison, a \$250,000 fine and 5 years of supervised release

Title 21, United States Code, Sections 846 and 841(a)(1) - Conspiracy to Distribute Controlled Substances

Maximum penalties: Life in prison, a \$10,000,000 fine and 5 years of supervised release

INVESTIGATING AGENCIES

Federal Bureau of Investigation

San Diego Police Department

Drug Enforcement Administration

San Diego Sheriff's Office

Chula Vista Police Department

U.S. Marshals Service

Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms

California Department of Justice

San Diego District Attorney's Office

An indictment itself is not evidence that the defendant committed the crimes charged. The defendant is presumed innocent until the Government meets its burden in court of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.