

NEWS RELEASE



***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
San Diego, California***

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

Assistant U. S. Attorney Peter J. Mazza (619) 546-7928

For Immediate Release

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - August 10, 2012

United States Attorney Laura E. Duffy announced that Salvador Nicola Colabella pled guilty yesterday before United States Magistrate Judge Ruben B. Brooks to conspiracy to conduct enterprise affairs through a pattern of racketeering activity (commonly known as RICO conspiracy), in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1962(d).

According to court documents, Colabella's role in the RICO conspiracy related to his participation in the Mexican Mafia, a prison gang that controls the criminal conduct of thousands of Hispanic, street-gang members in Southern California, both in prison and on the streets. As revealed in today's plea, Colabella controlled a significant portion of the criminal activity of Hispanic street-gang members in the San Diego area and was a validated Mexican Mafia member. As such, he is one of only about 150-200 Mexican Mafia members in the United States.

In his guilty plea, Colabella admitted to personally engaging in drug trafficking and extortion, as well as profiting from the criminal activity of those gang members who worked under his so-called protection. Colabella pledged to "protect" these criminals as long as they paid their "taxes" to the Mexican

Mafia. Such taxes are essentially extortion payments made by gang members and drug dealers to a Mexican Mafia member for the right to conduct their illegal activity free from interference from the Mexican Mafia.

In his plea agreement, Colabella also admitted that he had authority over several Mexican Mafia associates who assisted by collecting taxes on his behalf. Drug dealers who paid him taxes in this manner were responsible for distributing hundreds of pounds of methamphetamine and other drugs on the streets of San Diego. These other drug dealers have been charged in this or related cases. Colabella further admitted that he collected over \$10,000 in extortion payments (in either cash or property, such as cars). He also admitted that his associates resorted to violence in the course of extorting others. For example, one of Colabella's top associates stabbed a drug dealer over a dispute related to the drug dealer's payment of taxes. While Colabella did not order the stabbing, he admitted that such violence was reasonably foreseeable to him in the course of his participation in the conspiracy.

This case is part of "Operation Carnalismo," an investigation conducted by the Violent Crime Task Force - Gang Group (VCTF-GG), a group of federal, state, and local law enforcement agents led by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Operation Carnalismo resulted in charges against 36 individuals across five indictments. The indictments charged RICO conspiracy, violent crime in aid or racketeering, conspiracy to distribute drugs, and the distribution of drugs. A summary of the progress of these cases is provided below. United States Attorney Duffy praised the work of the VCTF-GG in marshaling the evidence related to Colabella's activities.

The plea is subject to final acceptance by United States District Judge Anthony J. Battaglia. Sentencing for Colabella is set for October 12, 2012, before Judge Battaglia.

DEFENDANT

Case Number: 12CR0290AJB

Salvador Nicola Colabella

SUMMARY OF CHARGES AGAINST COLABELLA

Title 18, United States Code, Section 1962(d) – Conspiracy to conduct enterprise affairs through a pattern of racketeering activity

Maximum penalties: Life in prison

PROGRESS OF CASES CHARGED AS PART OF OPERATION CARNALISMO

12CR290-AJB – Convictions

Salvadore Colabella – RICO conspiracy
Jose Luis Mercado – RICO conspiracy
Robert Mercado – Violent Crime in Aid of Racketeering
Silvano Hernandez – RICO conspiracy
Jose Briseno-Contreras – RICO conspiracy

12CR291-AJB

David York – Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine
Adrian Dominguez – Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine
Anna Sheneman – Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine

12CR292-AJB

Juan Guerrero – Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine
Brett Youkel – Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine
Lacy McElroy – Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine

12CR293-AJB

Alfredo Bazurto – Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine
Jose Pedro Covarrubias – Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine
John Atkinson – Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine
Annabel Vasquez – Conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine

INVESTIGATING AGENCIES

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Chula Vista Police Department
San Diego County Sheriff's Department
National City Police Department
San Diego Police Department
San Diego County District Attorney's Office
U.S. Bureau of Prisons
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
San Diego County Probation
Department, Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations
Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigations