

Department of Justice



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RECRUITER AND STRAW PURCHASER IN ARIZONA FIREARMS TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION SENTENCED TO 57 MONTHS IN FEDERAL PRISON

San Diego, CA – Danny Cruz Morones, age 24, of Phoenix, Arizona, was sentenced to serve 57 months in federal custody by the Honorable James A. Teilborg, United States District Judge, after entering guilty pleas to federal firearms trafficking charges, United States Attorney Laura E. Duffy announced today. The charges arise from Morones' participation in a Phoenix-based firearms trafficking organization, which was illegally acquiring firearms in Arizona for shipment, transportation and/or exportation to drug trafficking organizations in the United States and Mexico.

On May 14, 2012, Morones tendered guilty pleas to counts 1 and 2 of the indictment charging him with conspiracy to deal in firearms without a license, make false statements in connection with the acquisition of a firearm, and smuggling goods from the United States, all in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 371; and with willfully engaging in the business of dealing in firearms without a license, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 922(a)(1)(A).

United States Attorney Duffy expressed satisfaction as to the sentence imposed by the Court. "Stopping the illegal purchase of firearms is critical to preventing violent crime in the United States and Mexico. Criminal organizations which traffic in firearms are only able to do so with the assistance of 'straw purchasers.' Here, the defendant personally purchased and assisted in the straw purchase of over ninety (90) AK-47 style rifles – knowing that such firearms were to be smuggled to, and used in, Mexico. The 57-month sentence imposed by the Court today not only reflects the threat his criminal conduct caused to the safety of our communities, but serves to put others on notice that those who 'lie and buy for the other guy' will face significant jail time."

According to court records, Morones was involved in the Phoenix-based firearms trafficking conspiracy for at least a six-month period from on or before March 2010, through on or about August 2010. He was recruited by one of the leaders of the firearms trafficking organization, to act as a straw purchaser of firearms. During the course of his involvement in the conspiracy, Morones acted as the straw purchaser of twenty-seven (27) AK-47 style rifles. In addition, he recruited, directed and assisted others in the purchase of firearms. Among other

things, he recruited and directed codefendant Jonathan Earvin Fernandez to purchase an additional forty-nine (49) AK-47 style firearms; and assisted codefendant Alfredo Celis in the purchase of twenty (20) AK-47 style firearms. Morones admitted that during the course of his involvement in the firearms trafficking conspiracy, he was aware that the firearms were intended to be trafficked in Mexico.

In imposing the 57 month sentence, Judge Teilborg applied sentencing enhancement for Morones' aggravating criminal conduct, which included enhancements for: (1) number of weapons purchased; (2) trafficking in firearms; (3) transferring firearms with knowledge that they would be used in connection with another felony offense; and (4) acting as a manager and supervisor in the criminal organization by recruiting and directing others to straw purchase firearms.

This case is being investigated by agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, in Arizona and prosecuted in the Southern District of California by Assistant United States Attorneys Shane P. Harrigan, Timothy Coughlin and Mark Conover.

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