



Department of Justice

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FIVE DEFENDANTS CHARGED IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING RING FOR BRINGING YOUNG WOMEN INTO THE U. S. FROM MEXICO

At Least 10 Victims Were Allegedly Compelled to Become Prostitutes in Metro Atlanta

Atlanta, GA - AMADOR CORTES-MEZA, a/k/a "Javier," 34, JUAN CORTES-MEZA, 31, FRANCISCO CORTES-MEZA, a/k/a "Paco," 25, and RAUL CORTES-MEZA, a/k/a "Oscar," 21, all of Mexico and living in Norcross, Georgia, and EDISON WAGNER ROSA TORT, a/k/a "Caruso," 69, of Uruguay and living in Cartersville, Georgia, were arraigned today before United States Magistrate Judge Janet F. King on a 31-count superseding indictment charging them with human trafficking and related offenses.

"Human trafficking violates basic human rights and will not be tolerated," said United States Attorney David E. Nahmias. "Compelling women by force, fraud or coercion, or girls under the age of 18, to engage in commercial sex acts is a serious violation of federal law. The victimization of the young women in this case was unfortunately made easier by their illegal status, unfamiliarity with U.S. laws, and fear of law enforcement instilled in them by the traffickers. However, federal laws protect all victims of such heinous crimes, whether or not they are United States citizens. No victim should fear coming forward to report illegal activity and criminal abuse."

"The dismantling of global criminal infrastructures engaged in human trafficking remains among U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE's) highest priorities," said Kenneth A. Smith, Special Agent in Charge of ICE's Office of Investigations in Atlanta. "These victims were lured from their homes with a promise of a better life; instead, they were forced or coerced into prostitution. ICE will continue working with nongovernmental organizations and the U.S. Attorney's Office to identify and charge criminals engaged in these heinous activities and to rescue their victims."

According to Nahmias and the information presented in court: On June 25, 2008, a federal grand jury returned a 31-count superseding indictment against the defendants. All five defendants face federal charges of conspiracy to engage in sex trafficking, importing women for the purpose of prostitution, and harboring and shielding aliens for commercial advantage or private financial gain. In addition, all five defendants face substantive charges of sex trafficking, with JUAN CORTES-MEZA, AMADOR CORTES-MEZA, and RAUL CORTES-MEZA charged specifically with sex trafficking of minors. Lastly, JUAN CORTES-MEZA, AMADOR CORTES-MEZA, and FRANCISCO CORTES-MEZA are charged with smuggling aliens into the United States. The indictment alleges that the object of the conspiracy was to bring young women in from Mexico to engage in prostitution in the metropolitan Atlanta area. The indictment identifies 10 victims, all by their initials. The 10 victims include three young women who allegedly were compelled to engage in commercial sex acts against their will by the defendants through force, fraud and coercion, and four victims who were under the age of 18. JUAN CORTES-MEZA, AMADOR CORTES-MEZA, and FRANCISCO CORTES-MEZA assisted in smuggling some of the young women into the U.S. and transporting them from the Mexican border to the Atlanta area, where they were housed in Norcross and Cartersville. According to the indictment, JUAN CORTES-MEZA, AMADOR CORTES-MEZA and FRANCISCO CORTES-MEZA would become the young woman's boyfriend or promise her work in a restaurant or cleaning houses in the United States in order to obtain her agreement to be smuggled into the country.

The indictment alleges that AMADOR CORTES-MEZA, FRANCISCO CORTES-MEZA, JUAN CORTES-MEZA and ROSA TORT physically abused the young women. Some of the victims were beaten, threatened, or their families back in Mexico were threatened in order to force the victims to work as prostitutes against their will. It is alleged that at least one of the co-defendants was always present in the home where the victims lived in order to monitor them and direct the prostitution work. Some of the victims were not allowed to leave the house unaccompanied. ROSA TORT and RAUL CORTES-MEZA are charged with driving the women to various places where men or "johns" were willing to pay for sex with them. The women frequently serviced between 20 and 30 men a night, charging \$25, some of which went to the drivers who transported the young women to the "johns," while the majority of the money that was earned was kept by the traffickers.

Members of the public are reminded that the indictment only contains charges. The defendants are presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove the defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with assistance from the Bartow County Task Force, the Gwinnett County Sheriff's Office, and the Gwinnett County Police Department, Special Investigations Vice Unit.

Assistant United States Attorneys Susan Coppedge and Corey Steinberg and DOJ

Civil Rights Attorney Karima Maloney are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias (pronounced NAH-me-us), United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan.