



Department of Justice

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias
Northern District of Georgia

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CONTACT: Patrick Crosby
(404)581-6016
FAX (404)581-6160

MEMBER OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING RING PLEADS GUILTY TO SEX TRAFFICKING CHARGES INVOLVING A MINOR

Driver for Trafficking Ring Preyed on Young Mexican Women

Atlanta, GA - RAUL CORTES-MEZA, 21, of Mexico, pleaded guilty today in federal district court before United States District Judge Richard W. Story to a charge of sex trafficking of a minor.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias said of the case, "Human trafficking violates basic human rights and will not be tolerated. Participants at all levels of a trafficking organization face prosecution for their role in forcing young women to engage in commercial sex acts. This victimization of a young woman under 18 was unfortunately made easier by her illegal status, her age, and her unfamiliarity with the U.S. legal system. 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."

"Human trafficking occurs in hidden corners across the country," said Loretta King, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division in Washington D.C. "Few crimes are more reprehensible than profiting from the sexual exploitation of a minor. The Department is committed to enforcing laws that put traffickers behind bars."

"Human Traffickers care only about money and think nothing of leaving victims abused and exploited in the wake of their greed," said Kenneth Smith, Special Agent in Charge of ICE's Office of Investigations in Atlanta. "This case should put others engaging in the crime of human trafficking on notice. ICE will pursue those criminals who place a higher value on profit than on human dignity."

According to United States Attorney Nahmias and the information presented in court: From April 2008 to June 5, 2008, RAUL CORTES-MEZA harbored a seventeen-year-old girl who was allegedly romantically courted in Mexico by a co-conspirator, smuggled into the United States, and brought to the Norcross, Georgia area. After the victim's arrival in Norcross, RAUL CORTES-MEZA, knowing that the victim was under 18 years of age,

drove her to numerous apartments to have sex with paying clients. The defendant instructed the victim to go inside of the apartments and provide fifteen minutes of sexual services to each man who was present, and collected money from the men with whom the victim engaged in commercial sex.

CORTES-MEZA was indicted in June 2008 on 8 counts including conspiracy to engage in sex trafficking, importing women for the purpose of prostitution, harboring and shielding aliens for commercial advantage or private financial gain, and two substantive counts of sex trafficking of minors.

CORTES-MEZA pleaded guilty today to a substantive count of sex trafficking of a minor. This offense carries a mandatory minimum sentence of ten years in federal prison, with a maximum sentence of life in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. In determining the actual sentence, the Court will consider the United States Sentencing Guidelines, which are not binding but provide appropriate sentencing ranges for most offenders. A sentencing for CORTES-MEZA and other co-conspirators has not yet been scheduled by the Court.

The prosecution of human trafficking offenses is a top priority of the Justice Department. In the last seven fiscal years, the Civil Rights Division and U.S. Attorneys' Offices across the United States have increased by nearly seven-fold the number of human trafficking cases filed in court as compared to the previous seven fiscal years. In fiscal year 2007, the Department obtained a record number of convictions in human trafficking prosecutions.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security.

This case is being prosecuted by Karima Maloney, Trial Attorney for the Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division and Assistant U.S. Attorneys for the Northern District of Georgia Corey Steinberg and Susan Coppedge.

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.