



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

**NUMEROUS ARREST & SEARCH WARRANTS EXECUTED
SIMULTANEOUSLY TODAY IN ATLANTA AREA AND MCALLEN, TEXAS IN
TAKEDOWN OF MAJOR DRUG ORGANIZATION**

Weapons, Drugs, Money Seized in "Operation Grand Finale"

Atlanta, GA—Federal, state and local agents have completed initial searches and arrests in a multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency investigation coordinated through the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) program targeting a major Mexican drug trafficking organization (DTO) operating in Mexico; the McAllen, Texas area of the Rio Grande Valley; and the metropolitan Atlanta area. The organization and its members allegedly smuggled large quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine and marijuana into the United States for distribution in Texas, Georgia, Tennessee, and Illinois and elsewhere. Some of the weapons seized in the case were displayed at a news conference in Atlanta this morning, after the indictment and other documents were unsealed.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias said, "The coordinated action taken against this drug organization today is an important part of our fight against drug cartels who are using the metro Atlanta area as a base of operations. The takedown required planning and cooperation among a large number of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and literally hundreds of officers, all with one purpose: to disrupt and dismantle a dangerous organization that distributed huge amounts of illegal drugs across our nation."

FBI Special Agent In Charge Greg Jones said, "Today's arrests were the culmination of an 18-month-long Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation involving many federal, state, and local agencies, who worked together to disrupt a major cell of a Mexican cartel, a notoriously violent drug trafficking organization, and took a major step towards eradicating a significant threat to our economic and national security. Today's efforts are a clear example of what can be accomplished by the metro Atlanta law enforcement community when we work together toward a common threat."

IRS-Criminal Investigation Special Agent in Charge Reginael McDaniel said, "The indictments handed down in this investigation are another testament to what can be accomplished when all levels of law enforcement work together. As we take down these criminal organizations one after another, hopefully one day we can say Atlanta is no longer a repository for drug dealers."

During the year-long investigation, agents have seized approximately 581 kilograms of cocaine, approximately 219 pounds of methamphetamine, and approximately \$3.5 million in currency.

The investigation is code-named "Operation Grand Finale." Operation Grand Finale was initiated in February 2008 and was led by the David G. Wilhelm Atlanta OCDETF Strike Force. Operation Grand Finale has been designated as an OCDETF case, which recognizes the highest priority narcotics cases for Federal investigation and prosecution.

To date, Operation Grand Finale has resulted in federal charges against 16 defendants and the execution of three search warrants and two seizure warrants. This morning, law enforcement officials said that 15 defendants are in custody--two of them in McAllen, Texas, one in Tennessee, and a dozen in the Atlanta area. Of the 12 arrested here, two are expected to face state charges, and the other ten are expected to make an initial appearance before a United States Magistrate Judge sometime this week. One defendant is a fugitive, and an additional defendant not previously charged was arrested today.

According to the search warrant affidavits, these investigative efforts have determined that the targeted organization regularly transported large quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana from Mexico to Atlanta, and then transported currency accumulated from the sale of the illegal drugs back from Atlanta to McAllen, Texas to be smuggled across the Southwest border to the organization's leaders in Mexico.

The 16 defendants indicted by a federal grand jury in Atlanta on April 8, 2009, are:

MARTINA CASAS FLORES, a/k/a "Tina Flores," a/k/a "Mom;" FNU LNU (first name unknown/last name unknown) # 1, a/k/a "Ojos," a/k/a "Carlos," a/k/a "Cesar;" BELISARIO GIL MENDOZA, a/k/a "Cachoritto;" MARTIN ARREOLA-ROMERO, a/k/a "Sergio Placencia;" GERALD EDWARD DURRANCE; JUAN MANUEL MENDOZA, a/k/a "Ramon Aguilar Torres," a/k/a "Jose," a/k/a "Tio;" FNU LNU # 2, a/k/a "Cokis;" ANGEL LUIS AYALA, a/k/a "Maneques;" JUAN MANUEL ACOSTA, a/k/a "UM64;" RAPHAEL PEDROZA PEREZ, a/k/a "Tocayo;" FNU LNU # 3, a/k/a "Sancudin," a/k/a "UM1820;" ALFONSO RIOS, JR.; OTHA BARNES; JORGE LUCATERO-TORRES; OBIEL PINEDA-PARDO, a/k/a "Alejandro Castro", a/k/a "Beto," a/k/a "Cocho," ; and RAMIRO HERNANDEZ-DUQUE, a/k/a "Tartu".

These cases are being investigated by Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the David G. Wilhelm Atlanta OCDETF Strike Force.

The Strike Force team utilized agents and officers from the FBI, DEA, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, United States Marshal's Service, Fayette County Sheriff's Office, Doraville Police Department, Georgia State Patrol, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Georgia Department of Corrections, DeKalb County Police Department, and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles. The Strike Force is named in honor of U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement Assistant Special Agent in Charge David G. Wilhelm, who was murdered in Atlanta in March 2005.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta recommends parents and children learn about the dangers of drugs at the following web site: www.justthinktwice.com.

Assistant United States Attorneys Bret R. Williams and Phyllis Clerk are prosecuting the Operation Grand Finale 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.