



Department of Justice

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ANOTHER KEY MEMBER OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING RING PLEADS GUILTY TO SEX TRAFFICKING CHARGES

*At Least 10 Victims, Including Several Minors, Were Compelled
Into Prostitution in Metro Atlanta*

Atlanta, GA - JUAN CORTES-MEZA, 31, of Mexico, pleaded guilty today in federal district court to sex trafficking offenses involving young Mexican women. OTTO JAIME LARIOS PEREZ, 25, of Guatemala, also pleaded guilty today to making a false statement to law enforcement and, thereby, obstructing a human trafficking investigation. Earlier this year, two other defendants charged in the same indictment, Francisco Cortes-Meza and Raul Cortes-Meza pleaded guilty to sex trafficking offenses.

“Human trafficking is modern day slavery that robs individuals of their freedom and can have lasting psychological harm,” U.S. Attorney David E. Nahmias said. “Compelling woman or girls to engage in commercial sex acts is a serious violation of federal law. This insidious abuse preys upon those who may be vulnerable due to their immigration status, unfamiliarity with our legal system or fear of law enforcement. Federal laws protect all victims of such heinous crimes, whether or not they are citizens, and no victim should fear coming forward to report such criminal abuse.”

In Washington, Acting Assistant Attorney General Loretta King of the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, said, “Coercing commercial sex acts of women and girls is abhorrent illegal conduct that will not be tolerated. The Civil Rights Division and United States Attorney’s Offices across the country are committed to combating all forms of human trafficking and prosecuting those who sexually prey on vulnerable young women and girls in this manner for financial benefit.”

“Today's guilty plea cannot erase the pain and suffering that these young women experienced, but it can and does send the message that sex traffickers will be brought to justice,” said Kenneth A. Smith, special agent in charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Atlanta. “We will continue pursuing the ruthless traffickers who prey upon the hopes and dreams of young women.”

According to United States Attorney Nahmias and the information presented in court: From Spring 2006 through June 2008, JUAN CORTES-MEZA and others charged in the conspiracy recruited and enticed approximately ten victims to come to the Atlanta, Georgia area, from Mexico to engage in prostitution for the financial benefit of the members of the alleged conspiracy. JUAN CORTES-MEZA lured the victims, who were young, impoverished, rural Mexican women and girls with limited education, by falsely promising better lives, legitimate employment, or marriage, knowing that the victims would be compelled into prostitution through a scheme of strict controls and physical violence. Specifically, JUAN CORTES-MEZA, in or about Spring 2006 and aided and abetted by a co-conspirator, smuggled a young woman from Mexico into the United States by falsely promising that he would help her find employment in a restaurant or as a housekeeper.

Additionally, during Spring 2008, JUAN CORTES-MEZA met a 17-year old Mexican national, began a relationship with her, and eventually persuaded her to come with him to the United States under the false pretense that she would be his live-in girlfriend, all the while knowing that the minor victim would be forced to work in prostitution when she reached the Atlanta area. JUAN CORTES-MEZA smuggled the victim into the United States and transported her to a house in Norcross, Georgia. Shortly after her arrival in Norcross, JUAN CORTES-MEZA ordered the victim to engage in prostitution to make money. The victim was compelled to engage in commercial sex acts with numerous men every night, and to give JUAN CORTES-MEZA the money she collected. JUAN CORTES-MEZA controlled the victim's daily life and was physically violent with her.

The defendants who brought the victims into the United States used the services of drivers including defendant LARIOS PEREZ to take the victims to the locations where they were forced to engage in acts of prostitution. The drivers would keep a portion of the money earned by the victims. LARIOS PEREZ was prosecuted for false statements he made to law enforcement when intercepted with a victim in his car. At that time, LARIOS PEREZ lied to investigators about his relationship to the victim, claiming she was a family member, and falsely stated that he had never driven anyone for prostitution. In fact, LARIOS PEREZ had driven at least six of the young Mexican women to locations to engage in prostitution.

Sentencing hearings for JUAN CORTES-MEZA and OTTO JAIME LARIOS PEREZ have not yet been set by United States District Judge Richard W. Story. The sex trafficking offense carries a mandatory minimum sentence of ten years in federal prison. The false statement offense carries a maximum sentence of eight years in federal prison. In determining the actual sentence for both defendants, the Court will consider the United States Sentencing Guidelines, which are not binding but provide appropriate sentencing ranges for most offenders.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Assistant United States Attorneys Corey Steinberg and Susan Coppedge and Trial Attorney Karima Maloney of the Civil Rights Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit 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.