



Department of Justice

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DEFENDANTS SENTENCED IN INTERNATIONAL ECSTASY RING CODE- NAMED "OPERATION CANDYBOX"

Conspiracy Reached From Canada to Atlanta to Vietnam

Atlanta, GA - Members of an international ecstasy trafficking and money laundering cartel were sentenced this week by Chief United States District Judge Julie E. Carnes. The majority of these defendants will serve time in federal prison for their roles in smuggling hundreds of thousands of tablets of ecstasy (usually laced with methamphetamine) into the United States from Canada, distributing the ecstasy in Atlanta and other major U.S. cities, and utilizing money remitting companies to launder the drug proceeds back to Canada through Vietnam.

Acting United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said of the case, "These defendants thought that they could use Atlanta as a hub for their international drug trafficking and money laundering operation. Now, they have been sentenced to a combined 121 years in federal prison. The Drug Enforcement Administration and cooperating agencies should be commended for their efforts in shutting down this organization and taking these poisonous drugs off our streets. This case also serves as a strong warning for 'money remitters' who launder dirty drug money: you will be arrested with the drug traffickers and be held accountable with them in federal court."

Rodney G. Benson, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA Atlanta Field Division said, "These international ecstasy distributors smuggled hundreds of thousands of methamphetamine-laced ecstasy tablets from Canada to Atlanta. Ecstasy is a colorful pill that is marketed with a multitude of flashy designs and logos. The truth should be known that this drug is dangerous and can cause irreparable brain damage. These sentencing are possible because of the hard work conducted by a multitude of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies."

IRS-Criminal Investigation Special Agent in Charge Reginael McDaniel said, "This investigation is another testament to what can be accomplished when law enforcement works together. IRS Criminal Investigation will work tirelessly with other law enforcement agencies to dismantle these criminal organizations one by one."

According to Acting United States Attorney Yates, the charges and other information presented in court: Around December 2004, a Canadian citizen, CHIEM MACH, relocated from his home in suburban Toronto, Canada to Atlanta, Georgia, to coordinate an ecstasy distribution operation which involved smuggling hundreds of thousands of ecstasy pills from Canada into the United States and eventually to Atlanta. MACH's wife, MY NGOC HUYNH, son, THOMAS MACH, and "lieutenant," SON TRUNG TRAN, coordinated the Canadian side of the operation. The organization used drug transporters, such as PHI LAU, to drive the hundreds of thousands of pills across the border, which were usually concealed in gas tanks of vehicles. Once the drugs arrived in Atlanta, CHIEM MACH and other co-conspirators distributed the pills in the Atlanta area as well as other areas in the Eastern United States. CHIEM MACH died in pretrial custody in April 2007.

CHIEM MACH and others, such as HUNG THE PHAM, utilized the money remitting businesses to launder the proceeds from the drug sales back to Canada through Vietnam. In an investigation which lasted until approximately December 2005, authorities seized hundreds of thousands of ecstasy tablets, many of which were found to have been laced with methamphetamine. The defendants have been sentenced as follows:

● HUNG THE PHAM, 38, of Norcross, Georgia, was sentenced to 19 years and 7 months in prison followed by 5 years of supervised release. PHAM was an Atlanta-based "top lieutenant" for the organization, and oversaw the distribution of tens of thousands of ecstasy pills in the Atlanta area and laundered thousands of dollars of drug proceeds back to Canada. PHAM pleaded guilty on July 10, 2008 to conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute ecstasy, methamphetamine, and marijuana as well as conspiracy to launder monetary instruments.

● HUNG HOANG, 30, of Norcross, Georgia, was sentenced to 14 years in prison followed by 5 years of supervised release. The evidence showed HOANG was a significant ecstasy distributor in the Atlanta area who was arrested on June 24, 2005 after distributing 10,000 ecstasy pills laced with methamphetamine from outside of a Gwinnett County restaurant. HOANG pleaded guilty on April 29, 2008 to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute ecstasy, marijuana, and methamphetamine, as well as possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime.

● TIEN HO, 27, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, was sentenced to 15 years and 8 months in prison followed by 5 years of supervised release. TIEN HO was a large ecstasy distributor in the Atlanta area. TIEN HO pleaded guilty on July 15, 2008 to conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute ecstasy, methamphetamine, and marijuana.

● KHOA NGUYEN, 33, of Fayetteville, Georgia, was sentenced to 11 years and 3 months in prison followed by 5 years of supervised release. KHOA NGUYEN also distributed tens of thousands of ecstasy pills in the Atlanta area. KHOA NGUYEN pleaded guilty on May 21, 2008 to conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute ecstasy,

methamphetamine, and marijuana.

●MINH HO, 27, of Clarkston, Georgia, was sentenced to 12 years and 3 months in prison followed by 5 years of supervised release. MINH HO was arrested on June 24, 2005 in Gwinnett County, Georgia after a search of his vehicle revealed 4,000 ecstasy pills laced with methamphetamine, a loaded handgun, and \$11,000 in U.S. currency. MINH HO pleaded guilty on July 18, 2008 to conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute ecstasy, methamphetamine, and marijuana, substantive possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine, and possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime.

●SON TRUNG TRAN, 60, of Toronto, Canada, was sentenced to 12 years in prison followed by 3 years of supervised release. TRAN was one of the primary sources of supply for hundreds of thousands of ecstasy pills which entered the United States from Canada. TRAN pleaded guilty on July 18, 2008 to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute ecstasy.

●THOMAS MACH, 38, of Toronto, Canada, was sentenced to 6 years in prison followed by 3 years of supervised release. THOMAS MACH was the son of Chiem Mach, the leader of the organization, who coordinated the shipment of ecstasy pills from Canada to the Atlanta area. THOMAS MACH pleaded guilty on July 17, 2008 to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute ecstasy.

●PHOUC TIET, 40, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, was sentenced to 7 years and 4 months in prison followed by 5 years of supervised release. TIET was a significant distributor of ecstasy tablets in the Atlanta area. TIET pleaded guilty on September 6, 2006 to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute ecstasy and marijuana.

●MY NGOC HUYNH, 47, of Toronto, Canada, was sentenced to 4 years and 9 months in prison followed by 3 years of supervised release. HUYNH was the wife of CHIEM MACH, and packaged hundreds of thousands of ecstasy pills from her Toronto, Canada area home for transport into the United States. HUYNH also obtained the laundered drug proceeds which made their way back to Canada through Vietnam. HUYNH pleaded guilty on July 11, 2008 to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute ecstasy.

●PHI LAU, 46, of Atlanta, Georgia, was sentenced to 5 years and 10 months in prison followed by 3 years of supervised release. LAU was a primary drug runner for the organization who smuggled hundreds of thousands of ecstasy pills into the United States from Canada. LAU was arrested on August 5, 2005 as he attempted to cross into Michigan from Canada with 50,000 ecstasy tablets laced with methamphetamine concealed in the gas tank of his vehicle. LAU pleaded guilty on May 15, 2007 to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute ecstasy, methamphetamine and marijuana.

●HOA TRAN, 37, of Atlanta, Georgia, received a time-served sentence, followed by

3 years of supervised release. HOA TRAN, who has spent the last 4 years in pretrial detention, assisted CHIEM MACH with transporting tens of thousands of ecstasy pills which arrived in the Atlanta area from Canada. HOA TRAN pleaded guilty on September 20, 2007 to possession with intent to distribute ecstasy.

●DAT LE, 38, of Ontario, Canada, was sentenced to 4 years in prison followed by 1 year of supervised release. LE was based in Canada and recruited individuals to import ecstasy laced with methamphetamine into the United States. LE pleaded guilty on February 28, 2008 to the offense of unlawful use of a telephone to facilitate a conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute methamphetamine.

●PHUONG DUY NGUYEN, 25, of Woodstock, Georgia, received a time-served sentence, followed by 3 years of supervised release. NGUYEN, who has spent the last 4 years in pretrial detention, was arrested in Doraville, Georgia on October 30, 2005 while attempting to deliver 10,000 ecstasy pills, many of which were laced with methamphetamine. NGUYEN pleaded guilty on May 15, 2007 to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute ecstasy, methamphetamine and marijuana.

●ANDREW NGUYEN, 23, of Gainesville, Georgia, was sentenced to 2 years and 3 months in prison followed by 3 years of supervised release. ANDREW NGUYEN was arrested on June 24, 2005 after purchasing 1,000 ecstasy pills from co-conspirator HUNG HOANG at HOANG's Gwinnett County apartment. ANDREW NGUYEN pleaded guilty on May 9, 2007 to possession with intent to distribute ecstasy.

●PHUK TAN BANH, 30, of Marietta, Georgia, was sentenced to 3 years and 6 months in prison followed by 3 years of supervised release. BANH also distributed ecstasy tablets in the Atlanta area. BANH pleaded guilty on November 20, 2007 to possession with intent to distribute ecstasy.

●THAO PHAM, 28, of Tucker, Georgia, received a time-served sentence, followed by 3 years of supervised release. PHAM, who has spent the last 4 years in pretrial detention, distributed and transported tens of thousands of ecstasy pills laced with methamphetamine for the organization in the Atlanta area as well as in Tennessee. PHAM pleaded guilty on October 9, 2007 to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute ecstasy, methamphetamine and marijuana.

●PHUONG T. NGUYEN, 40, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, was sentenced to 3 years of probation. NGUYEN assisted PHOUC TIET in concealing ecstasy tablets. NGUYEN pleaded guilty on May 9, 2007 to possession with the intent to distribute ecstasy.

●AN NGUYEN, 40, of Stone Mountain, Georgia, was sentenced to 3 years of probation. AN NGUYEN operated a local money remitting company and laundered drug proceeds to Vietnam for the organization on multiple occasions. AN NGUYEN pleaded

guilty on August 11, 2008 to conspiracy to launder monetary instruments.

●LONG NGUYEN, 62, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, was sentenced to 3 years of probation. LONG NGUYEN was the manager of a local money remitting business who laundered drug proceeds for the organization. LONG NGUYEN pleaded guilty on February 29, 2008 to conspiracy to launder monetary instruments.

●PHI HUYNH, 25, of Chamblee, Georgia, was sentenced to 3 years of probation. HUYNH assisted HUNG HOANG with concealing ecstasy pills in their Gwinnett County apartment. HUYNH pleaded guilty to the offense of misprision of a felony on July 29, 2008.

●CHI LE, 33, of Norcross, Georgia, was sentenced to 3 years of probation. CHI LE is the wife of HUNG THE PHAM, and assisted him with laundering drug proceeds on one occasion. CHI LE pleaded guilty on November 16, 2007 to conspiracy to launder monetary instruments.

●THIEN TRAN, 32, of Ellenwood, Georgia, was sentenced on May 19, 2009 to 3 years and 4 months in prison followed by 5 years of supervised release. THIEN TRAN distributed ecstasy and marijuana in the Atlanta area. THIEN TRAN pleaded guilty on April 2, 2007 to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute ecstasy, methamphetamine and marijuana.

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.

This case was investigated by Special Agents of the Drug Enforcement Administration. Assistance on this case was provided by IRS-Criminal Investigation.

Assistant United States Attorneys Scott Hulse, Michael Herskowitz, Stephanie Smith, and Michael Brown prosecuted the case.

For further information please contact Sally Q. Yates, Acting United States Attorney, or Charisse 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.