



Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

3/4/10

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MS-13 GANG MEMBERS INDICTED FOR RACKETEERING

RICO Indictment Alleges Numerous Violent Overt Acts Including Seven Murders and Fourteen Attempted Murders

ATLANTA, GA - A federal indictment was unsealed today charging 26 members of the violent street gang called "Mara Salvatrucha" ("MS-13") with federal racketeering and related crimes in metropolitan Atlanta.

The twenty-nine-count indictment alleges that the defendants conspired to participate in the affairs of MS-13, an international violent criminal organization with approximately 10,000 members in various nations in North America, through a pattern of racketeering activity, which included multiple crimes of murder, attempted murder, kidnapping, and robbery in metropolitan Atlanta. It further alleges that the defendants conspired to preserve and enhance the power and reputation of the organization through acts of violence, to keep victims and community members in fear of the organization through acts and threats of violence, and to obstruct and prevent law enforcement officials from identifying, apprehending, and successfully prosecuting members of the gang for their violent criminal conduct.

"MS-13 is a ruthless street gang that has used violence to spread fear throughout our community," said Sally Quillian Yates, Acting United States Attorney. "These gang members seized every chance they had to kill, shoot and rob. They were not only devoted to wiping out rival gangs, but they showed no hesitation in robbing and shooting innocent victims. Now these gang members have to answer for their criminal behavior. Today's indictment is the product of tremendous cooperation between federal agents and local law enforcement officers. Because of our intensive collaboration to bring these violent gang members to justice, residents in Gwinnett and DeKalb Counties are safer."

"Gang members here in Georgia have become a growing problem which law enforcement has been tackling for the past several years and today's indictments represent a victory for the law enforcement community which has been working relentlessly to

pursue them and ensure that they feel the full weight of the law,” said Kenneth Smith, Special Agent in Charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Atlanta.

“The case shows the value of collaborative efforts of state and federal agencies to bring to justice a dangerous street gang through our combined efforts,” said Danny Porter, Gwinnett County District Attorney. “The Gwinnett County Police Department working with ICE were able to bring charges which led to statements which are integral to the pending federal case. My office moved the cases forward while protecting the integrity of the federal investigation. This type of coordination is becoming more necessary as we face these sophisticated criminal organizations.”

“I applaud the efforts of Acting United States Attorney Sally Yates, her staff and all of those involved in bringing forward this important case. This indictment represents the sort of decisive action against criminal street gangs like MS-13 that is critical in protecting our community from criminal street gang violence,” said Gwen Keyes Fleming, DeKalb County District Attorney. “My office remains prepared to provide the United States Attorney and her staff with whatever assistance and support they might need in bringing this case to a just conclusion.”

Four defendants made their initial appearance in court today and were arraigned on the charges before United States Magistrate Judge Gerrilyn Brill. Nine more defendants are scheduled to make their initial appearance in court and be arraigned on the charges tomorrow. The remaining defendants will make their initial appearance and be arraigned over the next few weeks. The charges were announced at a news conference in Atlanta this afternoon.

According to Acting United States Attorney Yates, the charges and other information presented in court: MS-13 is an international criminal gang that has been present in the Atlanta area since at least 2005. At that time, MS-13 staked out Gwinnett and DeKalb Counties as its territory. MS-13 gang members held meetings where they discussed attacking and killing rival gang members, collected money, shared firearms, and disciplined members who broke gang rules. Sixteen of the indicted defendants are charged for their alleged roles in committing seven murders, including four killings of suspected rival gang members, two murders of robbery victims, and one killing of a fellow gang member. These sixteen defendants and others are also charged with shooting nine suspected rival gang members as well as three persons who were not gang members.

The grand jury indicted the individuals listed below on February 24, 2010, and charged them with committing the following offenses:

1. MIGUEL ALVARADO-LINARES, a/k/a “Joker”, 21, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged with Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) conspiracy, three counts of Violent Crime in Aid of Racketeering (VICAR) involving murder, four counts of VICAR involving attempted murder, and seven counts of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
2. ERNESTO ESCOBAR, a/k/a “Pink Panther” and “Flaco,” 27, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, two counts of VICAR involving murder, two counts of VICAR involving attempted murder, and four counts of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
3. JOSE DELGADO, a/k/a “Fantasma”, 23, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, three counts of VICAR involving murder, one count of VICAR involving attempted murder, and four counts of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
4. VICTOR PASTOR, a/k/a “Canario,” 25, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving murder, one count of VICAR involving attempted murder, and two counts of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
5. ALEX FERRUFINO, a/k/a “Whiskey,” 30, of Tucker, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving murder, and one count of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
6. JOSEPH IVAN DIAS, a/k/a “Travieso,” 21, of Gainesville, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving murder, and one count of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
7. DIMAS ALFARO-GRANADOS, a/k/a “Toro,” 27, of Duluth, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, two counts of VICAR involving murder, two counts of VICAR involving attempted murder, and four counts of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
8. MIGUEL GUEVARA, a/k/a “Blacky,” 26, of Fort Walton Beach, Florida, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving murder, one count of VICAR involving attempted murder, and two counts of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
9. KENEDIS BONILLA, a/k/a “Mago,” 28, of Tucker, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving murder, one count of VICAR involving attempted murder, and two counts of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
10. SALVADOR FRANCO, a/k/a “Smiley,” 25, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, two counts of VICAR involving attempted murder, and two counts of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
11. EDWIN MENJIVAR, a/k/a “Chilly Willy” and “Vago,” 28, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving attempted murder, and one count of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.

12. WILLIAM ESPINOZA, a/k/a “Cheberria” and “El Crazy,” 29, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving felony murder, one count of VICAR involving attempted murder, and two counts of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
13. OMAR CUBILLOS, a/k/a “Pancho,” 25, of Gainesville, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving felony murder, and one count of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
14. CARLOS MENDOZA, a/k/a “Catracho,” 24, of Atlanta, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving felony murder, and one count of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
15. EMMANUAL HIDALGO, a/k/a “Scooby,” 24, of Chamblee, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving felony murder, and one count of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
16. JAIRO REYNA OZUNA, a/k/a “Flaco,” 25, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving murder, and one count of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
17. FRANCISCO RAMOS, a/k/a “Silent,” 25, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving murder, and one count of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
18. JOSE HERNANDEZ, a/k/a “Sparky,” 22, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving murder, and one count of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
19. CHRISTOPHER CASTRO RAMIREZ, a/k/a “Demente,” 21, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy.
20. ENZO BAIREZ, a/k/a “Ghost,” 20, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy.
21. IRVIN MEJIA-CRUZ, a/k/a “Lil Triste and Triste,” 29, of Duluth, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy.
22. WALTER ALDANA, a/k/a “Goofy,” 19, of Norcross, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy.
23. WILLIAM PINEDA, a/k/a “Slayer,” 27, of Lawrenceville, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving attempted murder, and one count of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
24. ELIO MARROQUIN-LOPEZ, a/k/a “Perico,” 23, of Chamblee, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, two counts of VICAR involving attempted murder, and two counts of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
25. ALEJANDRO GARCIA, a/k/a “Happy,” 27, of Chamblee, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving attempted murder, and one count of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.
26. REMBERTO ARGUETA, a/k/a “Pitufo,” 21, of Lilburn, Georgia, is charged with RICO conspiracy, one count of VICAR involving felony murder, and one count of using a firearm in relation to the commission of a crime of violence.

Seven other members of MS-13 have also been charged in separate federal indictments. FRANCISCO TEJADA-LANDAVERDE, a/k/a “Soldado,” ALDEN ONAN ESPANA, a/k/a “Kachita,” “Casper,” and “Axel Arias,” JOSE ROBERTO SALAZAR-ORELLANA, a/k/a “Tigre,” RONALD ESCOBAR-AGUINADA, and JUAN REYNALDO CORDOVA, a/k/a “Spunker,” were indicted by the grand jury on October 27, 2009, for committing five armed robberies of convenience stores in Gwinnett County in March 2009. On February 24, 2010, the grand jury indicted JERSON GOMEZ, a/k/a “Salvatrucha,” and ELMER RODRIGUEZ, a/k/a “Chifo,” for committing an armed robbery of a taxicab driver on March 1, 2009. In addition, through the course of this investigation, two other MS-13 members were charged with and sentenced for illegally reentering the United States without authorization. One other MS-13 member was charged with and sentenced for being an alien not lawfully admitted to this country who was in possession of a firearm. Since October 2007, Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials have deported nineteen members of MS-13 who were not lawfully present in this country.

In addition to the above federal prosecutions, the state has charged and prosecuted sixteen MS-13 members for their criminal gang activities.

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

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with assistance from the U.S. Marshals Service, Gwinnett County Police Department, DeKalb County Police Department, Norcross Police Department, Chamblee Police Department, and the Gwinnett County Sheriff's Office.

Assistant United States Attorneys Todd Alley and Paul Jones are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact Sally Q. Yates, Acting 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/ga.