



Department of Justice

United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates
Northern District of Georgia

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CONTACT: Patrick Crosby

(404)581-6016

FAX (404)581-6160

FOUR DEFENDANTS SENTENCED TO PRISON IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING RING

Conspirators Smuggled Women and Minors in from Mexico and then Compelled Them Into Prostitution in Metro Atlanta

ATLANTA, GA - JUAN CORTES-MEZA, 33, of Mexico; RAUL CORTES-MEZA, 22, of Mexico; EDISON WAGNER ROSA TORT, 71, of Cartersville, Georgia, and OTTO JAIME LARIOS PEREZ, 27, of Guatemala were sentenced today by United States District Judge Richard W. Story for participating in sex trafficking in an organization targeting young Mexican women.

United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said, “The U.S. Attorney's Office is committed to dismantling sex-trafficking organizations that operate in the Northern District of Georgia. Those who enslave and sell young women for sex, or who profit from it, must be held accountable. Nothing we can do will fully restore these victims from the harm they suffered at the hands of these criminals, but we will do everything in our power to stop others from being abused.”

In Washington, D.C., Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division said, “These four defendants committed heinous crimes against vulnerable women and girls who dreamed of better lives in the United States. Driven by greed, these defendants robbed their victims of basic human rights and dignities. The Department of Justice is committed to holding traffickers accountable and restoring the lives of their victims.”

“These traffickers exhibited a callous disregard for the lives of the victims whom they exploited for money,” said Kenneth Smith, Special Agent in Charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Atlanta. “While we cannot undo the terrible experiences that they endured, we hope that today's sentencing gives them some sense of closure.”

● JUAN CORTES-MEZA was sentenced to 16 years, 8 months in prison to be followed by 3 years of supervised release, and ordered to pay restitution to the victim in the amount of \$57,600. JUAN CORTES-MEZA was convicted of these charges on July 30, 2009, when he entered a guilty plea to one count of sex trafficking of a 17-year-old girl and one count of importation of an alien for immoral purposes.

● RAUL CORTES-MEZA was sentenced to 10 years in prison to be followed by 3 years of supervised release, and ordered to pay restitution to the victim in the amount of \$7,000. RAUL CORTES-MEZA was convicted of these charges on February 5, 2009, when he entered a guilty plea to one count of sex trafficking of a juvenile.

● EDISON WAGNER ROSA TORT was sentenced to 5 years in prison to be followed by 3 years of supervised release, and ordered to pay restitution to the victim in the amount of \$57,000. EDISON WAGNER ROSA TORT was convicted of conspiracy to engage in sex trafficking by force or coercion on September 16, 2008, when he entered a guilty plea.

● OTTO JAIME LARIOS PEREZ was sentenced to 2 years, 6 months in prison to be followed by 3 years of supervised release, and ordered to pay restitution to the victim in the amount of \$3,600. OTTO JAIME LARIOS PEREZ was convicted of these charges on July 30, 2009, when he entered a guilty plea to one count of making a false statement to investigators regarding the sex trafficking ring run by the CORTES-MEZA family.

According to United States Attorney Yates and the information presented in court: From Spring 2006 through June 2008, these defendants and others charged in the conspiracy recruited and enticed approximately ten victims to come to the Atlanta area from Mexico and then forced them into prostitution for the financial benefit of the members of the alleged conspiracy. Often the conspirators, including JUAN CORTES-MEZA, would lure the women to the U.S. by promising better lives, legitimate employment, or romantic relationships with the defendants. Drivers, such as LARIOS PEREZ, RAUL CORTES-MEZA, and ROSA TORT, collected the victims from the homes where they lived with the defendants in Norcross and drove them to apartments and homes where paying clients waited for commercial sex.

Specifically, JUAN CORTES-MEZA smuggled the 17-year-old female victim into the United States by falsely promising that he would help her find employment in a restaurant or as a housekeeper. The victim was thereafter 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.

RAUL CORTES-MEZA harbored and transported a victim and benefitted financially from causing her to engage in commercial sex acts. While another co-conspirator brought

the victim into the U.S., RAUL CORTES-MEZA drove her to apartments to have sex with paying clients. He then collected money and kept some for himself, giving the rest to other co-conspirators.

ROSA TORT took a victim from the CORTES-MEZA trafficking ring and kept her in Cartersville, Georgia, where he forced her to perform commercial sex acts against her will.

LARIOS PEREZ pleaded guilty to making false statements to law enforcement when he was intercepted with a victim in his car. When caught with a victim, 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 to any location for prostitution. In fact, LARIOS PEREZ had driven at least six of the young Mexican women to locations to engage in prostitution.

The Department of Justice has identified human trafficking prosecutions such as this one as a top priority in the Department. In order to bring defendants to justice, victims of crime may be eligible for immigration status in the United States to assist in the prosecution. Six of the victims addressed the court about what they suffered at the hands of this sex trafficking ring, telling of physical threats, beatings, and intimidation which caused them to work as prostitutes against their will. NOTE: The Department of Homeland Security Tip Line to report trafficking crimes is 1-866-347-2423.

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

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

For further information please contact Sally Quillian Yates, 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.