



# Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

11/23/10

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## **MEXICAN NATIONAL FOUND GUILTY ON ALL COUNTS FOR MULTIPLE FEDERAL SEX TRAFFICKING AND IMMIGRATION CRIMES**

ATLANTA, GA - A federal jury returned guilty verdicts late today against AMADOR CORTES-MEZA, 36, of Tlaxcala, Mexico, on multiple charges of sex trafficking and human smuggling offenses related to a scheme to force young women and juveniles into prostitution. The jury found CORTES-MEZA guilty on all 19 counts after a trial lasting approximately two weeks.

United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said, "This defendant preyed on the most vulnerable of victims--girls and young women hoping for a better life-- through promises of jobs or marriage. He then physically abused them, enslaved them, and forced them into prostitution. This trial provided a glimpse into the monstrous world of human trafficking. We are committed to giving voice to the victims of these horrific crimes and holding the defendants accountable for their crimes."

In Washington D.C., Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division, said, "This jury has vindicated the rights of numerous young women and girls this defendant exploited, abused, and forced into prostitution. The exploitation of these vulnerable individuals is a violation of the fundamental rights on which our country was founded, and is intolerable in a nation that prides itself on freedom. The defendants preyed on the hopes and dreams of these young victims and turned those dreams into a living nightmare. The Department of Justice will continue to prosecute vigorously the trafficking of human beings to uphold the rights of those held in modern-day slavery, whether for labor or for sexual exploitation."

"We hope that the victims who suffered at the hands of this monster can breathe a sigh of relief knowing that justice has been served," said Brock Nicholson, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the ICE/HSI office that oversees the Carolinas and Georgia. "We are committed to working with our local, state and federal partners to target human traffickers who think that their heinous crimes will go unchecked."

According to United States Attorney Yates and the evidence presented in court: From Spring 2006 through June 2008, AMADOR CORTES-MEZA and others charged in the conspiracy recruited and enticed approximately ten victims to enter the United States illegally from Mexico and come to the Atlanta area. AMADOR CORTES-MEZA then forced them into prostitution for the financial benefit of the members of the conspiracy. He lured the young women and girls to the U.S. by promising better lives, legitimate employment,

or romantic relationships with him. A brother and two nephews of AMADOR CORTES-MEZA were previously convicted after pleading guilty to sex trafficking charges related to this scheme.

Evidence at trial showed that after smuggling the victims into the United States, AMADOR CORTES-MEZA forced them to engage in prostitution by isolating them from their families, brutally beating them, and threatening to harm them and their loved ones. One victim testified that he told her that “he was going to hit her where it hurt the most” and she took that to mean he was going to go after her family. Another victim testified that the defendant told her he would kill her parents in Mexico if he was ever arrested. On a nightly basis, AMADOR CORTES-MEZA provided the victims to drivers who drove them to apartments and homes in Duluth, Chamblee, Canton, Marietta, Forrest Park, and as far away as Alabama and North Carolina to provide commercial sex to as many as 40 customers a night. The victims testified that the clients were charged \$25-30 for ten to fifteen minutes of time with them, from which the drivers were given \$10.

Witnesses at trial testified about brutal physical attacks from AMADOR CORTES-MEZA including one incident in which he beat a young woman with a rod and electric cord before throwing an iron at her head, slicing open her scalp. This woman testified that the defendant took the money she made because, in her words, she “was his property.” Another witness testified AMADOR CORTES-MEZA beat her with a broomstick and a closet rod, ultimately breaking her finger. On the witness stand, she showed the jury her permanently disfigured finger. This same witness testified that after her first two days of forced prostitution she felt “destroyed.” When she told the defendant she was in pain from the commercial sex acts he forced her to perform, AMADOR CORTES-MEZA replied that it “didn't mean a thing” to him and that she had to go to work the next day as well. Other victims recalled that on their first night of forced prostitution they had to perform sex acts with 20 to 27 total strangers.

Evidence at trial further showed that AMADOR CORTES-MEZA also prostituted girls he knew were under the age of 18. Two juveniles were smuggled into this country by AMADOR CORTES-MEZA, one of them when she was 14 years old. The defendant had been caught by authorities illegally crossing the border into Arizona with two of his victims, including one of the juveniles for whom he had obtained a fake birth certificate. After being deported, the defendant immediately re-entered the United States with both victims. AMADOR CORTES-MEZA told the fourteen-year old he loved her, would marry her, and asked her to work in prostitution to earn money for their life back in Mexico. In reality, AMADOR CORTES-MEZA already had a wife and children in Mexico, but he kept that victim in prostitution for approximately three years. She testified about one incident during which AMADOR CORTES-MEZA pulled a knife on her and she thought that he was going to kill her.

Witnesses also testified that the defendant and his co-defendants strictly monitored the victims, keeping them under close supervision and control. The victims testified that they were terrified of AMADOR CORTES-MEZA and his associates, who required them to perform up to 40 acts of prostitution night.

The jury convicted AMADOR CORTES-MEZA on nineteen counts, after one day of deliberation. Those counts included offenses of sex trafficking by force, fraud, and coercion, sex trafficking of minors, conspiracy, importation and harboring of aliens for the purposes of prostitution, and smuggling aliens into the

United States. AMADOR CORTES-MEZA faces a maximum sentence of life in prison. No sentencing date has yet been set by the Court.

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. Nine 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) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Special Agents assigned to the Atlanta Special Agent in Charge office.

Deputy Chief Karima Maloney of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and Assistant United States Attorney Susan Coppedge 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](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan).