



U.S. Department of Justice

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FIVE INDIVIDUALS SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING CHARGES

ROCKFORD -- PATRICK J. FITZGERALD, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; together with GARY HARTWIG, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Division of the United States Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and STEPHEN A. LUZINSKI, Acting Special Agent-In-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Drug Enforcement Administration, today made the following announcement:

Today, **LEOBARDO RICO LARA**, 42, Island Lake, Illinois, was sentenced in Rockford federal court to 92 months in prison, without parole, for possessing with the intent to distribute 884 kilograms of marijuana on March 26, 2008. United States District Judge Frederick J. Kapala also ordered Lara to serve 5 years of supervised release after his prison term and to pay a fine of \$12,500. Lara was convicted on August 28, 2009, after a two-week jury trial.

In addition to Lara's conviction, on August 28, 2009, **IRINEO GONZALEZ**, 30, Cabrel, Jalisco, Mexico, **ISRAEL PILLADO**, 22, Chicago, Illinois, and **ARTURO MORALES**, Island Lake, Illinois, were convicted of conspiring to possess marijuana with the intent to distribute it and with possessing with the intent to distribute 884 kilograms of marijuana. On December 29, 2009, all three men were sentenced to prison terms. Gonzalez was sentenced to 180 months, Pillado was sentenced to 150 months, and Morales was sentenced to 72 months. All three men were also sentenced to 5 years of supervised release.

A fifth individual, **CASIMORO HERNANDEZ**, 34, Waukegan, Illinois, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to possess marijuana with the intent to distribute it on August 5, 2009. On November 6, 2009, Hernandez was sentenced to 18 months in prison and 3 years of supervised release. In pleading guilty to the conspiracy charge, Hernandez admitted that on March 17, 2008, Customs and Border Protection officers working at the seaport in Charleston, South Carolina conducted a physical search of a shipping container and located approximately 204 "Decorative Oven Mud Vases" inside cardboard boxes which all contained "bricks" of marijuana. On March 26, 2008, a United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent acting in an undercover capacity delivered the shipping container to its intended destination, an industrial park in McHenry, Illinois. Hernandez admitted being present at that location when the agent arrived with the shipping container. After the shipping container arrived co-defendants Irineo Gonzalez and Israel Pillado arrived in a white cargo van. Gonzalez spoke to Hernandez and offered Hernandez approximately \$100 to help unload the shipping container. Hernandez agreed to assist in unloading the shipping container. Before the container was opened, Pillado left in the white van. When the container was opened, Gonzalez jumped in the back of the truck and started to look into the broken box that ICE agents had previously placed in the shipping container. Hernandez, Morales and Lara also gathered around the

box and looked inside. Gonzalez moved the box to get better access to the opening. Hernandez reached into the open box and grabbed one of the bricks of marijuana and showed it to Gonzalez, Lara and Hernandez. Hernandez placed the brick back in the box. Gonzalez attempted to hide the bricks of marijuana by turning the open part of the box to face the wall. Gonzalez then reached in the box and pulled a brick out of the box and tossed it to Lara. Morales took the brick from Lara and held it as if to see how much it weighed. Morales wiped the brick with his shirt sleeve as if he was wiping off his fingerprints. When Hernandez handled the brick he was aware that the substance contained in the brick was marijuana. Hernandez, Morales and Lara then began to unload all 18 pallets from the container and placed the pallets on the ground near the container. Lara used a bobcat-style machine, that belonged to Lara, as a forklift to unload the pallets from the shipping container. Hernandez, and Morales assisted Lara in unloading the pallets while Gonzalez directed them where to place the pallets. During the course of the off-loading of the trailer, Hernandez took eight bricks of marijuana and hid them. Hernandez intended to retrieve the bricks after he finished helping unload the entire shipment and to distribute those bricks to others.

Hernandez further admitted in his plea agreement that once the container was completely unloaded, the undercover ICE agent left the industrial park with the empty shipping container. After the ICE agent left, Pillado arrived driving a white cargo van. Pillado and another individual spoke to Gonzalez for a couple of minutes before Pillado left in the cargo van. Shortly after Pillado left, ICE agents arrested Hernandez, Gonzalez, Pillado, Morales and Lara. The “bricks” inside the boxes on the 18 pallets Hernandez and his co-defendants unloaded from the shipping container contained marijuana and that the total weight of the marijuana was 884 kilograms.

The case was investigated by the United States Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement with the assistance of the Drug Enforcement Administration. The case was prosecuted in federal court by Assistant United States Attorneys Joseph C. Pedersen and Mark T. Karner.

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