



*United States Attorney
District of New Jersey*

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**THREE PLEAD GUILTY TO CONSPIRING TO TRAFFIC COCAINE ON
COMMERCIAL AIRLINES FROM THE WEST INDIES
TO ENGLAND VIA THE UNITED STATES**

NEWARK, N.J. – Two men and one woman pleaded guilty today to participating in an organization that smuggled cocaine aboard commercial airlines from the West Indies to England via the United States, United States Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Mervin Francis, 34, of St. Lucia, West Indies, and Genard Howard, 35, and Tajara Barnes, 34, both of Brooklyn, New York, pleaded guilty before United States District Judge Dennis M. Cavanaugh to separate, Superseding Informations charging each of them with conspiracy to import and to export cocaine.

According to documents filed in this and related cases and statements made in Newark federal court:

Francis admitted that between about February and September 2008, he was part of an organization that transported narcotics from Jamaica and St. Lucia, through the United States, to Great Britain. The organization hid cocaine in the handrails of luggage that was transported by couriers, such as Howard and Barnes, aboard commercial airlines. Once the narcotics were received in Great Britain, Francis received Western Union transfers on behalf of the organization that were sent as payment for such narcotics.

Barnes and Howard admitted to conspiring to travel from the United States to St. Lucia on April 24, 2008, for the purpose of bringing back narcotics on May 1, 2008. While in St. Lucia, they received narcotics from individuals including Francis. They admitted to then traveling from New York, New York to London, England on May 5, 2008 with narcotics hidden in their suitcases.

Today's guilty pleas stem from a multi-jurisdictional and international investigation into a narcotics trafficking ring that has resulted in multiple narcotics seizures and the charging of 14 individuals to date, 10 of whom have pleaded guilty in the District of New Jersey.

Roger Folkes, a/k/a "Kirk," and Romeo Folkes, a/k/a "Rocky," are in custody in Jamaica pending extradition to the United States. Defendant Prine George Alfonso Jones, a/k/a "Prince," is in custody in Great Britain. David Evans is charged in a separate Complaint; the case against him is pending.

Judge Cavanaugh permitted Howard and Barnes each to remain free on \$100,000 bail, and Francis remains detained pending sentencing, which is scheduled for August 8, 2010 for all three defendants. At sentencing, they each face a statutory mandatory minimum of 5 years in prison, a maximum potential penalty of 40 years in prison, and a fine of up to \$2 million.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Cavanaugh will consult the advisory United States Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining the sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Fishman credited Special Agents of the United States Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Peter T. Edge; and the Drug Enforcement Administration's New Jersey Division under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge John G. McCabe – in coordination with Police Officers with the West Midlands Police Complex Casework Unit in Birmingham, England and Officers of the United Kingdom Border Agency – for the investigation leading to the Indictment and today's guilty pleas.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Eric W. Moran and Zahid N. Quraishi of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Newark.

As for the defendants with pending cases, the charges and allegations against them are merely accusations, and they are considered innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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Defense counsel:

Mervin Francis – Howard B. Brownstein, Esq., Union City, New Jersey

Genard Howard – Susan C. Cassell, Esq., Union City, New Jersey

Tajara Barnes – Paul Condon, Esq., Union City, New Jersey