



***United States Attorney
District of New Jersey***

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CONTACT: Rebekah Carmichael
Office of Public Affairs
(973) 645-2888

**THREE CURRENT AND FORMER AIRLINE EMPLOYEES ARRESTED IN
CONNECTION WITH CONSPIRACY TO SMUGGLE COCAINE
INTO THE UNITED STATES**

Over 125 Kilograms Seized in Five Separate Shipments

NEWARK, N.J. – Three current and former Continental Airlines employees have been arrested by federal agents on charges that they participated in a conspiracy to smuggle cocaine into the United States through Newark Liberty International Airport – a conspiracy that involved seizures of approximately 125 kilograms of cocaine – United States Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Yunior Lopez, 25, of Elizabeth, N.J.; Amaurys Caminero, 29, of Linden, N.J.; and Kerlwin Taveras, 27, of Bronx, N.Y., were each charged with one count of conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine. The arrests were precipitated by the latest seizure of cocaine – over 47 kilograms – at Newark Liberty International Airport over Labor Day weekend. Lopez and Caminero were arrested at the airport September 4, 2010, and September 5, 2010, respectively. Taveras was picked up last night in Bronx, N.Y. All three defendants were detained following an appearance this afternoon before United States Magistrate Judge Claire C. Cecchi in Newark federal court.

According to the criminal Complaints filed today:

Continental Airlines operates a daily non-stop flight between Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic and Newark Liberty International Airport, where both Lopez and Caminero are employed by Continental Airlines as baggage handlers. Taveras is a former baggage handler for the airline.

Lopez, Caminero, and co-conspirators, including other Continental employees, conspired to smuggle cocaine into the United States through the airport. The cocaine was put aboard flights in the Dominican Republic, usually packaged in gym bags with hand-written luggage tags that indicated they had been checked at the departing gate. Once the planes landed in Newark, Lopez, Caminero, and others arranged to remove the cocaine from the airplanes, take it from the airport, and facilitate its distribution in the New Jersey and New York areas.

Over the course of the investigation, law enforcement officers intercepted numerous communications in support of the conspiracy and effected five separate seizures of significant quantities of cocaine, totaling about 125 kilograms.

U.S. Attorney Fishman stated: “Criminals may think that having inside operators at airports will save them from detection, but they underestimate our commitment to and focus on the integrity of those who work there. We will continue to come down hard on anyone who tries to compromise the security of the planes on which we fly or to bring drugs into the neighborhoods in which we live.”

“Regardless of their role in a drug trafficking organization, persons engaged in the illegal importation of narcotics into the United States through our nation’s airports are on notice that ICE will use all of its investigative resources to disrupt and dismantle these criminal enterprises, large or small, and bring them to justice,” said Peter T. Edge, Special Agent in Charge of Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Homeland Security Investigations in Newark.

If convicted, each of the defendants faces a mandatory minimum penalty of 10 years in prison, and a maximum potential penalty of life in prison and a \$4 million fine.

U.S. Attorney Fishman praised special agents of the Department of Homeland Security’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Peter T. Edge in Newark, for their work leading the investigation of this case. He also credited agents of the Department of Homeland Security’s Customs and Border Protection, under the direction of Director, Field Operations New York, Robert E. Perez, for their important contributions to the investigation.

The government is represented by Assistant United States Attorney Zach Intrater of the United States Attorney’s Office Criminal Division.

The charges and allegations contained in the Complaints are merely accusations, and the defendants are considered innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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Defense counsel:

Yunior Lopez: John McGovern, Esq., Newark, N.J.

Amaurys Caminero: Cynthia Hardaway, Esq., Newark, N.J.

Kerlwin Taveras: Gary Mizzone, Esq., Little Falls, N.J.