



Department of Justice

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Northern District of New York

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11 V-NOT GANG MEMBERS CHARGED IN RICO CONSPIRACY

RICHARD S. HARTUNIAN, United States Attorney, Northern District of New York, announces that a Superseding Indictment ("Indictment") unsealed today in United States District Court charges eleven (11) defendants with conspiracy to conduct and participate in the affairs of an enterprise, known as the V-Not Gang, through a pattern of racketeering activity.¹ The Indictment alleges that the gang has operated within the City of Syracuse from at least 2003 through the present. The racketeering activity described in the Indictment includes murder and other shootings, drug trafficking, firearms possession, robbery and witness tampering. The charged defendants, all of whom are Syracuse residents, are:

**KAHARI SMITH, a/k/a Kiss, age 26,
HABAKKUK NICKENS, a/k/a HB, age 26,
JEFFREY POWELL, a/k/a Ghost, age 27,
KENNETH JACKSON, a/k/a Karome, age 27,
TITUS NICKENS, a/k/a Tit, age 28,
RIADDA TRAVET, a/k/a Rico, age 22,
CHRISTOPHER MIKE, a/k/a Jah or C-Mike, age 27,
JERMEERE MCKINNON, a/k/a Hood, age 23,
NATHAN KING, a/k/a Nate, age 21,
DWAYNE HESTER, a/k/a Black, age 27, and
DONALD R. JOHNSON, JR., a/k/a D-Jigga, age 24.**

Law enforcement authorities arrested six of the defendants at various locations in and around Syracuse early this morning. The other five defendants were previously incarcerated. All 11 defendants made their initial appearance before United States Magistrate Judge David Peebles at 1:00 p.m. today.

¹ The charges are merely accusations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

The original Indictment charged Kahari Smith with Murder In Aid of Racketeering for killing Kihary Blue. That charge is now Count Two in the Superseding Indictment.

The Indictment alleges that members of the V-Not Gang: (1) maintain a specific geographic territory within the City of Syracuse in which only gang members can sell crack cocaine and marijuana; (2) protect that exclusive crack distribution territory with violence; (3) obtain drugs from various suppliers; (4) project a very violent attitude and respond to violence with violence in order to preserve their stature in the gang community; (5) use graffiti, hand signs, and tributes on their clothing to slain gang members to signify their gang membership; (6) use criteria such as willingness to use violence, ability to sell drugs, and familial connections to determine membership; and (7) routinely carry and use firearms in connection with their gang activity.

There are multiple acts of violence and drug distribution set forth in the Indictment, including 1 murder, 11 shootings, 7 other acts of gun possession, 2 assaults and 19 acts of crack distribution and/or possession with intent to distribute crack. With respect to the murder, the Indictment includes allegations that on November 26, 2010, gang member Kahari Smith shot and killed Kihary Blue on Interstate 81 in downtown Syracuse as part of an ongoing feud between the V-Not and Bricktown gangs.

If convicted, each defendant faces up to life imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, and three years of supervised release following any period of incarceration.

This prosecution resulted from a long-term investigation conducted by the Syracuse Gang Violence Task Force, which is comprised of agents and detectives from the following agencies: United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (Syracuse Office), the Syracuse Police Department, the Onondaga County Sheriff's Department, the New York State Police, and the United States Marshals Service. The Onondaga County District Attorney's Office and the Drug Enforcement Administration - Syracuse office, also assisted in the investigation.

United States Attorney Hartunian said, "Gangs such as the V-Not Gang poison our streets with drugs, violence, and all manner of crime, victimizing children and other innocent people. Here in Syracuse, we in law enforcement have a strong tradition of working together to address violent gang activity. Our prior successful cases against the Boot Camp, Elk Block, Brighton Brigade, Eastside, 110 and Bricktown gangs demonstrate that our federal, state, and local partnership is stronger than ever. Our commitment to stamping out gang violence is unwavering, unrelenting, and will continue until gangs no longer terrorize our city." U.S. Attorney Hartunian thanked all of the agencies and agents who made this investigation a success and Mayor Stephanie Miner for her continuing efforts to make Syracuse a safer city.

Mayor Miner said, "Chief Fowler and I made combating gang violence and crime a key priority from day one, but we knew we would need help from other partners in law enforcement to be effective. The U.S. Attorney's Office has been professional, aggressive and instrumental in our efforts," said Syracuse Mayor Stephanie A. Miner. "I commend the members of the Syracuse Gang Violence Task Force for the work they did to make today's indictment possible and for the difficult and dangerous work they do every day to make our community a safer place."

Syracuse Police Chief Frank Fowler said, "The V-Not gang represents one of the most violent street gangs in our city. They have committed numerous acts of violence in our neighborhoods. The fact that these defendants are in federal custody makes Syracuse a safer

place for everyone. The individuals in our community who are currently choosing to follow the same violent path as these V- Not gang members will surely be the targets of one our next RICO investigations."

Further questions or inquiries may be directed to Assistant U.S. Attorney John M. Katko, who is prosecuting the case, or Executive Assistant U.S. Attorney John G. Duncan. Both can be reached at 315-448-0672.

END OF NEWS RELEASE
