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**ASSOCIATE OF COLOMBIAN NARCO-TERRORIST GROUP EXTRADITED
TO UNITED STATES ON COCAINE IMPORTATION CHARGES**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and MICHELE M. LEONHART, Acting Administrator of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"), today announced that JUAN JOSE MARTINEZ VEGA, a/k/a "Gentil Alvis Patino," a/k/a "Chiguero," a close associate of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or "FARC"), has been extradited from Colombia to the United States to face cocaine importation conspiracy charges. The FARC is Colombia's main leftist rebel group, which has been designated by the State Department as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. On March 1, 2006, the United States unsealed an historic indictment charging fifty defendants -- all the FARC's top leadership (the "FARC leaders") -- with cocaine importation conspiracy. According to the Indictment:

The FARC, which occupies large swaths of territory in Colombia, is responsible for the production of more than half the world's supply of cocaine and nearly two-thirds of the cocaine imported into the United States. During its tenure, the FARC has evolved from a leftist rebel organization into the world's leading cocaine manufacturer. In the mid-1980s, as cocaine production in Colombia began to expand, the FARC taxed all aspects of the cocaine trade. In the 1990s, the FARC leaders, recognizing the profit potential of the cocaine trade, ordered that the FARC become the exclusive buyers of the raw material to make cocaine, known as cocaine paste, in all areas under FARC occupation.

The FARC leaders set strict rules to control the cocaine trade, including the requirement that farmers sell all cocaine paste they produced to the FARC at the prices set by the defendants. Large markets were set up throughout Colombia, where farmers sold the cocaine paste. The FARC leaders stated that enforcement of such rules was crucial to the FARC's survival, because the organization would not be able to finance its operations without the money it earned through the cocaine trade. The FARC leaders required their commanders to enforce FARC's cocaine policies through violent, often lethal means. Calling it "Revolutionary Justice," the FARC leaders ordered that any farmer who violated their cocaine policies should be murdered, an order which was carried out with frequency.

Once the FARC purchased the cocaine paste, the FARC leaders directed that the drugs be brought to jungle cocaine laboratories under FARC control, where the paste was converted into ton quantities of finished cocaine and shipped out of Colombia to the United States and elsewhere. To transport the finished cocaine out of Colombia, the FARC secured and operated clandestine air strips in its territories.

The FARC is a hierarchical organization comprised of twelve to eighteen thousand members, and is led by a seven member Secretariat and a 27 member Central General Staff, or Estado Mayor, responsible for setting the cocaine policies of the FARC. At the lowest level, the FARC is made up of 77 distinct military units organized by their geographical location, called Fronts. Clusters of Fronts form seven distinct Blocs, each of which is led by a Bloc Commander. Various FARC Fronts coordinate their cocaine and cocaine paste manufacturing and distribution activities, based on their geographical location and whether they have a local FARC cocaine conversion laboratory. In addition, Fronts located on Colombia's borders were primarily responsible for transporting cocaine outside of Colombia, and facilitating the exchange of cocaine and cocaine paste for weapons and supplies used by the FARC. The FARC leaders also required the Fronts to finance themselves through cocaine manufacturing and distribution. FARC Fronts able to produce the greatest revenue were responsible for contributing money and resources to support other Fronts that generated smaller drug revenues. Narcotics proceeds were distributed throughout the FARC, for the enrichment of the Secretariat, Estado Mayor and Bloc Commanders, and in order to purchase weapons and supplies for all members of the FARC.

The indicted members of the Secretariat and Estado Mayor, noting that the FARC could not survive without the

proceeds generated from cocaine manufacturing, directed its members to attack and disrupt coca eradication fumigation efforts. The FARC leadership ordered its members to take countermeasures against fumigation, including shooting down fumigation aircrafts; forcing local farmers to participate in rallies against fumigation; and attacking Colombian infrastructure to force the Colombian Government to divert resources from fumigation. Recognizing that the United States has contributed significantly to Colombian fumigation efforts, the FARC leaders also ordered FARC members to kidnap and murder United States citizens in order to dissuade the United States from its continued efforts to fumigate and disrupt the FARC's cocaine manufacturing and distribution activities.

Much of the FARC's conflict with what had been Colombia's main right wing paramilitary organization, the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, (the "AUC"), has been over control over coca-growing areas. The FARC's army has been used, to a significant degree, to advance its cocaine trafficking efforts, including through campaigns against the AUC in coca-rich regions in an attempt to take control of the cocaine profits in those areas, and strategically defending areas of high coca production from advances of the Colombian Government.

MARTINEZ VEGA was a FARC associate who worked closely with the FARC's 16th Front and assisted the FARC in procuring weapons, ammunition, money and other materials in exchange for cocaine and cocaine paste. Over several years, MARTINEZ VEGA made dozens of such deliveries to the 16th Front, including a delivery in February 2002 of approximately 37 tons of weapons and ammunition in exchange for approximately 2,500 kilograms of cocaine paste and 750 million Colombian pesos. MARTINEZ VEGA is also alleged to have led, in 1996, a squad of FARC members which located four other FARC members suspected of stealing arms which the FARC purchased with cocaine, all of whom were immediately executed. MARTINEZ VEGA was presented today in District of Columbia federal court before United States District Judge THOMAS F. HOGAN.

Co-defendant ERMINO CUEVAS CABRERA, a/k/a "Mincho," the first charged FARC leadership defendant to be extradited, arrived in the United States from Colombia on September 19, 2007. According to the indictment, CUEVAS CABRERA, a/k/a "Mincho," was a manager of cocaine laboratories for the FARC's 14th Front, where he oversaw the production and distribution of hundreds of tons of cocaine for the benefit of the FARC and for his brother, indicted defendant JOSE BENITO CABRERA CUEVAS, a/k/a "Fabian Ramirez," current member of the FARC's Estado Mayor. CUEVAS-

CABRERA was arraigned on September 20, and ordered detained pending trial.

Co-defendant JORGE ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA, a/k/a "Ivan Vargas," was extradited from Colombia and had his initial Court appearance in the United States on November 5, 2007. RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA served as a member of the Estado Mayor of the FARC, the Front Commander of the 24th Front, a member of the leadership of the FARC's Middle Magdalena Bloc, and a FARC special forces commander. In these roles, he directed the purchase of hundreds of thousands of kilograms of cocaine paste, and transmitted billions of Colombian pesos in drug proceeds to higher ranking FARC officials. He is further charged with operating a FARC cocaine-processing laboratory. As commander of the 24th Front, RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA is alleged to have ordered the murder of at least eight farmers. RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA is also alleged to have led FARC military campaigns ordered by the FARC Secretariat against the AUC in order to retake coca-rich lands, and to have ordered a FARC member to shoot down fumigation planes. RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA is also alleged to have plotted with another charged defendant to retaliate against United States law enforcement officers who were conducting this investigation. RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA was arraigned on November 29, 2007, and ordered detained pending trial.

The State Department has offered \$75 million in rewards for information leading to the arrest of the highest-ranking FARC leadership defendants, who remain fugitives.

"The FARC remains the largest, most profitable, and most dangerous narcotics trafficking organization in the world. It poses a serious threat not only in Colombia, but also on the streets of New York and other American cities, where it's cocaine is sold," said U.S. Attorney GARCIA.

"Juan Martinez-Vega operated at the FARC's core, dealing arms and ammunition in exchange for thousands of kilos of cocaine that ultimately made its way to American neighborhoods," said DEA Acting Administrator LEONHART. "Martinez Vega's extradition serves as another blow to FARC operations and demonstrates this country's aggressive pursuit and prosecution of drug criminals who seek profit from poison."

The investigation resulting in these charges was led by the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, working with the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force (which is comprised of agents and officers of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration,

the New York City Police Department, the United States Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, the Department of Homeland Security Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the New York State Police, the United States Marshals Service, the United States Secret Service and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives), and the DEA's Bogota, Colombia, Country Office. The investigation, conducted under the auspices of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force ("OCDETF") Program, involved unprecedented cooperation from the Colombian Military, the Colombian National Police, and the Colombian Fiscalia. Mr. GARCIA praised all the law enforcement partners involved in the investigation, and thanked the Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs for their involvement in the extradition process.

The case is being supervised by the Office's International Narcotics Trafficking Unit.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely allegations. All defendants are presumed innocent unless and until convicted in a court of law.

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