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NIGERIAN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKER AND RUSSIAN PILOT
CONVICTED ON INTERNATIONAL COCAINE CONSPIRACY CHARGES
IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT

*Two Defendants Convicted For Conspiring To Traffic More Than \$100
Million Worth Of Cocaine In Culmination Of Historic Joint
Undercover Operation In Republic Of Liberia*

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that CHIGBO PETER UMEH and KONSTANTIN YAROSHENKO, participants in an international narcotics trafficking ring, were convicted today in Manhattan federal court of conspiring to import cocaine into the United States. Their convictions are the culmination of a historic, joint undercover operation, "Operation Relentless," between the United States and the Republic of Liberia. The jury acquitted defendants NATHANIEL FRENCH and KUDUFIA MAWUKO, who had been charged along with UMEH and YAROSHENKO. United States District Judge JED S. RAKOFF presided over the three week trial.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA stated: "Today's guilty verdicts against Chigbo Peter Umeh and Konstantin Yaroshenko deal a blow to the international drug trade and demonstrate the power of global cooperation. The DEA's bold undercover operation, aided by the Republic of Liberia and our other law enforcement partners abroad, succeeded in disrupting a dangerous network of South American-based narcotics traffickers, who conspired to exploit West African countries as trans-shipment hubs for tons of cocaine. As a result of unprecedented international teamwork among the U.S., Liberia and other nations, this Office was able to prosecute these pushers of poison and bring them to justice."

According to the trial evidence and other documents filed in the case:

During the last decade, drug trafficking organizations based in South America have increasingly used countries along or near the West African coast as trans-shipment hubs for importing

massive quantities of cocaine to be later distributed in Europe or elsewhere within Africa. Through a combination of privately owned aircraft and maritime vessels, these organizations, predominantly based in Colombia and Venezuela, have transported hundreds of tons of cocaine, worth billions of dollars, to places such as Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Sierra Leone, Togo, Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, and Liberia. In so doing, representatives of these drug trafficking organizations have often sought to bribe high-level public officials with large cash payments and narcotics in order to ensure the safe passage, storage, and distribution of their cocaine shipments.

UMEH and YAROSHENKO attempted to bribe high-level officials in the Liberian Government, in order to protect shipments of vast quantities of cocaine, and to use Liberia as a trans-shipment point for further distribution of the cocaine in Africa and Europe. In particular, UMEH met with two individuals he knew to be Liberian government officials. These two officials, the Director and Deputy Director of the Republic of Liberia National Security Agency ("RLNSA"), both of whom were in fact were working with the DEA in an undercover capacity. The Director of the RLNSA is also the son of the current President of Liberia. In a number of the meetings involving these Liberian officials, UMEH and YAROSHENKO also met with a confidential source working with DEA (the "CS"), who purported to be a business partner and confidante of the Director of the RLNSA.

In seeking to ensure the safe passage of the cocaine shipments, UMEH and YAROSHENKO agreed to make payments to the Director and the Deputy Director of the RLNSA in cash and also in the form of cocaine. The CS advised them that a portion of the cocaine paid to the CS would be transported from Liberia to Ghana, from where it would be imported into New York.

UMEH, who is from Nigeria, was a broker who assisted various international narcotics suppliers in shipping numerous tons of cocaine from South America to West Africa, from where the cocaine was transported to Europe or elsewhere within Africa. YAROSHENKO, who is from Russia, was an aircraft pilot and aviation transport expert who transported thousand-kilogram quantities of cocaine throughout South America, Africa, and Europe.

UMEH and YAROSHENKO participated in a series of face-to-face meetings and phone conversations with the cooperating Liberian officials and the CS in connection with at least three different shipments of cocaine that they were trying to transport through Liberia: (1) a shipment of approximately 4,000 kilograms,

which was to be flown from Venezuela to Monrovia, Liberia, and the retail value of which was over \$100 million; (2) a shipment of approximately 1,500 kilograms, which was to be flown from Venezuela to Monrovia, Liberia, on an aircraft originating in Panama; and (3) a shipment of approximately 500 kilograms of cocaine, which was to be transported by a ship from Venezuela to a location off the coast of Liberia. Through these meetings, they understood that once the cocaine was transported to Liberia, a portion of the shipment (representing the payment to the CS) would be transported into Ghana, from where it would be placed on a commercial flight destined for the United States.

During a meeting in Monrovia, UMEH stated that the 4,000 kilograms of cocaine which the conspiracy intended to import into Liberia had been supplied and protected by the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (the "FARC"). The FARC is an international terrorist group dedicated to the violent overthrow of the democratically elected Government of Colombia.

On May 28 and 29, 2010, UMEH and YAROSHENKO were arrested in Liberia. They were transferred by the Government of Liberia to the custody of the United States to face trafficking charges in the Southern District of New York. JORGE IVAN SALAZAR CASTANO and MARCEL ACEVEDO SARMIENTO were also charged with UMEH and YAROSHENKO. SALAZAR CASTANO is incarcerated in Spain and ACEVEDO SARMIENTO is in Colombia, awaiting extradition to the United States.

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UMEH, 43, faces a mandatory minimum term of 20 years in prison, and a maximum term of life in prison. YAROSHENKO, 42, faces a mandatory minimum term of ten years in prison, and a maximum term of life in prison. They are scheduled to be sentenced by Judge RAKOFF on July 28, 2011, at 4:00 p.m.

Mr. BHARARA praised the work of the Special Operations Division of the DEA, the DEA Lagos Country Office, the DEA Warsaw Country Office, the DEA Bogota Country Office, the DEA Rome Country Office, the U.S. Department of Justice Office of International Affairs, and the U.S. State Department. He also thanked the U.S. Embassy in Liberia, the Republic of Liberia and its National Security Agency, and the Security Services of Ukraine for their efforts.

This prosecution is being handled by the Office's Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys JENNA M. DABBS, CHRISTOPHER LAVIGNE, RANDALL JACKSON, and MICHAEL M. ROSENSAFT are in charge of the prosecution.