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**LEADERS OF COLOMBIAN NARCO-TERRORIST ORGANIZATION  
PLEAD GUILTY IN U.S. DISTRICT COURT TO CONSPIRING  
TO IMPORT TONS OF COCAINE INTO THE UNITED STATES**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and JOHN P. GILBRIDE, the Special Agent-in-Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's New York Field Division, ("DEA"), announced that JORGE ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA, a/k/a "Ivan Vargas," and GERARDO AGUILAR RAMIREZ, a/k/a "Cesar" -- leaders of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or "FARC") -- pleaded guilty today to conspiring to import ton-quantities of cocaine into the United States. The FARC is Colombia's main leftist rebel group and a U.S. State Department-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA and AGUILAR RAMIREZ pleaded guilty today before United States District Judge THOMAS F. HOGAN in District of Columbia federal court.

According to the previously-unsealed Indictment to which the defendants pleaded guilty, other documents filed in this case, and statements made in court:

The FARC, which occupies large swaths of territory in Colombia, is a hierarchical organization which, at its height during the time of the conspiracy, was comprised of 12,000 to 18,000 members. At the lowest level, the FARC is made up of 77 distinct military units, called Fronts, organized by geographical location. These in turn are grouped into seven "blocs." The FARC 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. The FARC 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, and is the world's leading cocaine manufacturer. The FARC

initially involved itself in the cocaine and cocaine paste trade by imposing a "tax" on individuals involved in every stage of cocaine production. Later, in the 1990s, recognizing the profit potential, FARC leadership ordered that the FARC become the exclusive buyer of the raw cocaine paste used to make cocaine in all areas under FARC occupation.

In the late 1990s, the FARC leadership, including RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA, met and voted unanimously in favor of a number of resolutions, including resolutions to: expand coca production in areas of Colombia under FARC control; expand the FARC's international distribution routes; increase the number of crystallization labs in which cocaine paste would be converted into cocaine; appoint members within each Front to be in charge of coca production; raise prices that the FARC would pay to campesinos (peasant farmers) from whom they purchased cocaine paste; and mandate that better chemicals be used to increase the quality of cocaine paste.

In late 2001 or early 2002, the FARC leadership, including RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA and AGUILAR RAMIREZ, participated in a meeting in which they further resolved, among other things, to: increase cocaine trafficking routes overseas, including to the United States; establish better ways to exchange cocaine and cocaine paste for weapons; and to pay more to campesinos for cocaine paste.

RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA served as the Commander of the FARC's 24th Front and as a member of the FARC's Estado Major. In that capacity, he directed the purchase of hundreds of thousands of kilograms of cocaine paste, and transmitted billions of Colombian pesos in cocaine proceeds to higher-ranking FARC officials. AGUILAR RAMIREZ was the commander of the FARC's 1st Front and was ultimately responsible for all of that Front's criminal activities. Among other things, RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA and AGUILAR RAMIREZ each conspired with others to manufacture and distribute thousands of tons of cocaine in Colombia, with the knowledge and intent that such cocaine would be imported into the United States.

AGUILAR RAMIREZ was captured on July 2, 2008, in a Colombian military operation which freed three American hostages who had been held by the FARC for over five years, as well as several Colombian hostages. AGUILAR RAMIREZ was extradited to the United States on July 16, 2009. RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA was arrested by Colombian authorities in late 2004 and extradited to the United States on November 1, 2007.

Earlier today, in separate proceedings, RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA and AGUILAR RAMIREZ each pleaded guilty to the sole count of the Indictment, which charges them with conspiring to import cocaine into the United States, and conspiring to distribute cocaine with the knowledge and intent that it would be imported into the United States. This offense carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years and a maximum sentence of life in prison. As part of its extradition requests, however, the United States has previously provided assurances to the government of Colombia that it will not seek a life sentence for the defendants, but instead will ask for a prison term of years.

During today's guilty plea proceeding, RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA acknowledged that from approximately 1998 through early October 2004, he was the commander of the 24<sup>th</sup> Front of the FARC and that he led and directed other members of the 24<sup>th</sup> Front in the manufacture and distribution of thousands of kilograms of cocaine, knowing and intending that at least some of this cocaine would be imported into the United States. AGUILAR RAMIREZ acknowledged at his proceeding that from approximately 1998 through early July 2008, he was the Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Front of the FARC and that he led and directed other members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Front in the manufacture and distribution of thousands of kilograms of cocaine, knowing and intending that at least some of this cocaine would be imported into the United States. AGUILAR RAMIREZ also acknowledged that he, along with other members of this cocaine importation conspiracy, possessed firearms in connection with his narcotics trafficking activities.

RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA, 46, and AGUILAR RAMIREZ, 49, are scheduled to be sentenced by Judge HOGAN on March 5, 2010.

U.S. Attorney BHARARA stated: "Today, two FARC leaders admitted that they conspired to send literally tons of cocaine from Colombia into the United States. With each step to disrupt this illicit narcotics trade, we siphon fuel from the machine of terror. Guilty pleas by these dangerous narco-terrorists are significant milestones in our fight against the FARC, whose criminal activities threaten the national security of both Colombia and the United States. We will continue to work with our partner, the DEA, to confront narco-terrorism around the world."

"These FARC leaders conspired to manufacture and sell thousands of kilograms of cocaine in the United States and elsewhere in order to enrich themselves and buy arms to further their terrorist activities," said Special Agent-in-Charge GILBRIDE. "Using drug trafficking proceeds, the FARC has

intimidated and murdered thousands of Colombians over several decades. After today's hearing, these two narco-terrorists will neither be selling dangerous drugs nor harming innocent Colombians."

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

This case is being prosecuted in the District of Columbia by the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. Special Assistant United States Attorneys ERIC SNYDER, PABLO QUIÑONES, and RANDALL JACKSON are in charge of the prosecution.

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