



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

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CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
HERBERT HADAD, MEGAN GAFFNEY
HEATHER TASKER, BRIDGET KELLY
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 637-2600

SIX MEMBERS OF VIOLENT ALBANIAN
ORGANIZED CRIME GROUP CONVICTED

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today that six members of a violent organized crime enterprise known as "The Corporation" were convicted after a fourteen-week jury trial in Manhattan federal court of committing numerous crimes in the Bronx, Westchester County, and Astoria, Queens, including racketeering offenses ("RICO"), extortion, firearms offenses, loansharking, extortionate debt collection, and operation of a large-scale illegal gambling business.

The evidence at trial established that "The Corporation," identified at trial as the Rudaj Organization (after one of its leaders, ALEX RUDAJ), was an organized crime syndicate comprised of dozens of members and associates that worked with and rivaled the traditional mafia families in the New York area. The Rudaj Organization operated a massive network of illegal gambling parlors and gambling machines, and bookmaking operations. The evidence showed that the Rudaj Organization was founded in the early 1990s by ALEX RUDAJ, a/k/a "Sandro Rudovic," a/k/a "Uncle," a/k/a "Allie Boy," and NARDINO COLOTTI, a/k/a "Lenny," former associates of the Gambino Crime Family. Throughout the 1990s, according to the evidence at trial, the Rudaj Organization seized and exercised control over illegal gambling operations in the Morris Park and Arthur Avenue areas of the Bronx, and in Westchester County.

In June 2001, the evidence at trial established, the Rudaj Organization violently seized control over illegal gambling operations in Astoria, Queens - territory which formerly had been controlled by the Lucchese Crime Family. In connection with their takeover, five of the defendants and other members of the group severely beat a member of the Astoria gambling community to send the message that the Rudaj Organization was now in control of illegal gambling in Astoria. Similarly, the trial evidence demonstrated that in August 2001, the six defendants and numerous

other members and associates of the Rudaj Organization, armed with firearms, stormed a rival gambling establishment opened by a Gambino Family associate and shut it down. The evidence also established that the Rudaj Organization committed numerous other acts of violence and intimidation to maintain and expand their control of illegal gambling in Astoria.

The evidence at trial proved that defendants ALEX RUDAJ, NARDINO COLOTTI, and NIKOLA DEDAJ, a/k/a "Big Nick," a/k/a "Nicky Nails," were the primary leaders of the Rudaj Organization, and were responsible for, among other things, supervising the criminal activities of the other members of the Rudaj Organization and resolving disputes with other organized criminal groups in the New York City area. Specifically, when disputes arose between the Rudaj Organization and other criminal enterprises in the New York City area, including the traditional mafia families, the leaders of the Rudaj Organization would resolve these disputes, if necessary, by using threats of violence and actual violence against the members and associates of those other criminal groups. Such occurred when, according to evidence at trial, armed members of the Rudaj Organization met with members of the Gambino Crime Family at a gas station in New Jersey for a standoff, and DEDAJ pointed a gun at the gas pumps and threatened to blow everyone up.

The evidence at trial further established that defendants PRENKA IVEZAJ, a/k/a "Frankie," a/k/a "Big Frank," LJUSA NUCULOVIC, a/k/a "Louie," and ANGELO DIPIETRO, a/k/a "Fat Angelo," were high-ranking members of the Rudaj Organization and participated in its criminal affairs, including extortions, loansharking and extortionate debt collection, and running its illegal gambling enterprise. Defendant NUCULOVIC acted as the Rudaj Organization's boss of gambling operations in Astoria, Queens, from 2001 until 2004. The evidence at trial showed that the members and associates of the Rudaj Organization frequently carried and brandished firearms.

The charges against these six defendants were unsealed in October 2004, at which time more than twenty members and associates of the Rudaj Organization were charged with various offenses including illegal gambling. Eight additional defendants have pled guilty to gambling offenses, one defendant has pled guilty to gambling and attempted extortion charges, and five defendants face trial in the future on gambling charges.

As a result of today's convictions, defendants RUDAJ, COLOTTI, DEDAJ, IVEZAJ, and NUCULOVIC each faces, among other penalties, a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, and a statutory minimum sentence of seven years' imprisonment. Defendant DIPIETRO faces, among other penalties, a maximum sentence of life

imprisonment, and a statutory mandatory minimum sentence of twenty-five years' imprisonment. In July 2005, DIPIETRO was convicted in a related case of extortion, firearms offenses, robbery, and extortionate debt collection by a jury in Manhattan federal court. DIPIETRO awaits sentencing in that case, and faces, among other penalties, a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, and a statutory mandatory minimum sentence of thirty-two years' imprisonment.

In addition, just prior to trial, a seventh defendant, GJELOSH LELCAJ, a/k/a "Joey," pled guilty to racketeering offenses including extortion and illegal gambling, and illegal re-entry into the United States, thereby avoiding trial.

All six defendants were previously detained pending trial at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, Manhattan, New York. Sentencing is scheduled for April 7, 2006, at 2:00 p.m before United States District Judge DENISE COTE.

ALEX RUDAJ, 38, lives in Yorktown Heights, New York. NARDINO COLOTTI, 43, lives in the Bronx, New York. NIKOLA DEDAJ, 42, lives in Yonkers, New York. LJUSA NUCULOVIC, 47, lives in Hopewell Junction, New York. PRENKA IVEZAJ, 40, lives in Queens, New York. ANGELO DIPIETRO, 49, lives in Hopewell Junction, New York.

Mr. GARCIA praised the efforts of the FBI and of the Westchester County District Attorney's Office in the investigation and prosecution of these crimes.

Assistant United States Attorneys TIMOTHY J. TREANOR, JENNIFER G. RODGERS, and BENJAMIN GRUENSTEIN are in charge of the prosecution.

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