



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

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U.S. ANNOUNCES EXTRADITION OF
COLOMBIAN POLICE OFFICERS
ON COCAINE CONSPIRACY CHARGES

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, today announced the extradition of two Colombian police officers charged with smuggling more than \$50 million worth of cocaine for importation into the United States. The Indictment charges LEONIDAS MOLINA-TRIANA, a/k/a "Sofoco," a/k/a "Don Oscar," a former Major in the Colombian National Police ("CNP") and HUMBERTO AVILA, an active CNP patrolman, and others, with conspiracy to facilitate cocaine shipments through the El Dorado International Airport, in Bogota, Colombia, to Mexico en route to the United States.

According to the Indictment, from approximately August 2005 until April 2006, representatives of Colombia's notorious Norte Valle Cartel, including former high-ranking Colombian police officials like MOLINA-TRIANA, recruited active members of the Colombian police responsible for El Dorado Airport security operations, as well as employees of Avianca Airlines at El Dorado Airport's cargo facility, to facilitate the smuggling of cocaine from Colombia to Mexico and ultimately into the United States. The Indictment alleges that between October 14 and 17, 2005, these corrupt Colombian police officials and Avianca Airlines employees permitted 409 kilograms of cocaine, with a wholesale value of more than \$10 million, to pass through security at the Avianca Airlines cargo facility at El Dorado Airport without detection. AVILA, an active CNP patrolman stationed at El Dorado Airport, passed the cocaine through security and guarded the shipment of drugs for three days in the Avianca cargo facility until the drugs were sent to Mexico City. On October 17, 2005, the 409 kilograms of cocaine were allegedly transported aboard an Avianca flight to Mexico City, Mexico, where they were seized by Mexican law enforcement personnel. A photograph of the seized 409 kilograms of cocaine is attached.

The Indictment further alleges that in March and April 2006, the Norte Valle Cartel used the corrupt officials and others to attempt to smuggle approximately 1,752 kilograms of cocaine, with a wholesale value of more than \$40 million, from Bogota, Colombia, to the United States via Mexico. 552 kilograms of the cocaine were seized on April 3, 2006 (photograph attached), and the remainder, approximately 1,200 kilograms of cocaine, was seized on April 4, 2006.

The extraditions announced today were part of "Operation Caso Dorado," a joint investigation conducted by the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York (the "Office") and the DEA (in Bogota, Colombia, and New York), with the cooperation of ICE and Colombian and Mexican law enforcement authorities.

MOLINA-TRIANA was presented on Friday, December 29, 2006, before Magistrate Judge ANDREW PECK, and was ordered detained pending trial. AVILA was presented today before Magistrate Judge JAMES C. FRANCIS, and was also ordered detained pending trial.

If convicted, the defendants face a maximum sentence of life in prison and a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years' imprisonment, although the United States provides assurances to Colombia that it will not seek life sentences for defendants extradited from Colombia. The Indictment also seeks the forfeiture of \$50 million from the defendants based on their roles in conspiring to import cocaine into the United States.

Mr. GARCIA praised the cooperative investigative efforts of the DEA, ICE, and Colombian and Mexican law enforcement officers.

"The integrity of the law enforcement and airline personnel responsible for the safety of airline passengers and cargo is of critical importance," stated Mr. GARCIA. "If such officials facilitate the smuggling of drugs or other contraband destined for the United States, the Government will pursue them whether they act here or abroad."

The prosecution is being handled by the International Narcotics Trafficking Unit of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. MARC P. BERGER and KEVIN R. PUVALOWSKI are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges and allegations contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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