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**FORMER IMMIGRATION OFFICIAL SENTENCED TO 3 AND A HALF
YEARS IN PRISON FOR TAKING BRIBES IN EXCHANGE FOR
GRANTING CITIZENSHIP TO ALIENS**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that JIMMIE ORTEGA, 59, a former Supervisory District Adjudications Officer with the naturalization unit of the United States Citizenship & Immigration Services ("CIS") in New York City, was sentenced to 42 months in prison today for taking tens of thousands of dollars in bribes in exchange for granting United States citizenship to ineligible aliens. The sentence was imposed by United States District Judge JOHN F. KEENAN in Manhattan federal court. According to the Indictment and other documents publicly filed in this case, as well as statements made during ORTEGA's guilty plea proceeding:

From October 2004 to April 2006, ORTEGA used his position with CIS to obtain approvals for ineligible aliens who were seeking United States Citizenship in exchange for bribes. ORTEGA, working with one or more other CIS employees, arranged to approve aliens' citizenship applications without the aliens' meeting necessary requirements, including the requirements that they appear at CIS's office in New York for an interview with a CIS adjudications officer, demonstrate proficiency in the English language during such interview, and pass the required civics and United States history examination during such interview.

ORTEGA solicited and received bribes from each alien of between \$1,500 and \$4,000 in exchange for arranging for that alien's naturalization, and solicited bribes from at least 20 aliens in connection with the scheme. ORTEGA retired from his position at CIS in April 2006.

ORTEGA was arrested in connection with these charges on October 26, 2006, and pleaded guilty in July, 2007, to one count

of conspiracy, one count of soliciting bribes, and one count of procuring or attempting to procure naturalization unlawfully.

During his guilty plea, ORTEGA admitted, "I accepted bribes from applicants seeking citizenship that could not speak, read or understand sufficient English to pass the English proficiency and United States history requirements," and "as a result of my conduct, many applicants were approved for citizenship that were not entitled."

In addition to the term of imprisonment, Judge KEENAN sentenced ORTEGA to forfeit \$50,000.

Seven of ORTEGA's ten co-defendants -- ALBERTO COLON, ANDREA PEGUERO SANTILLANA, BLAS ISRAEL DIAZ, JOSE LORA, BILERCA SANTANA, JOSE ALMONTE, and JAMLET GARCIA -- pleaded guilty to a charge of unlawfully procuring naturalization. OSCAR FABREGAS, a District Adjudications Officer with CIS, pleaded guilty to one count of making a false statement relating to naturalization. The cases against RAFAELINA PICHARDO and DIAULICIA CABA are pending.

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, stated, "Jimmie Ortega sold United States citizenship to immigrants who did not qualify for it. In doing so, he violated the trust of his country, abused his position of power, and corrupted the process by which immigrants earn citizenship."

Mr. GARCIA thanked the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General's Office for their work in the investigation.

This case is being handled by the Office's Public Corruption Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys CHRISTINE Y. WONG and MARCUS A. ASNER are in charge of the prosecution.

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