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**FIVE ARRESTED FOR ARRANGING SHAM MARRIAGES BETWEEN
FOREIGN NATIONALS AND UNITED STATES CITIZENS TO
EVADE IMMIGRATION LAWS**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, SALVATORE DALESSANDRO, the Acting Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE"), and CHRIS PAUL, the Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Field Office of the Diplomatic Security Service ("DSS") of the Department of State, announced that VLADIMIR BARARUSHKIN, TEA SANCHEZ, TODD TOLSON, PABLO CRUZ and NANCY DIAZ were arrested today on charges relating to the arrangement of sham marriages between foreign nationals and United States citizens in order to facilitate the foreign nationals' fraudulent applications for permanent resident status. According to the Indictment filed in Manhattan federal court:

From November 2002, the defendants operated the fraudulent marriage scheme out of two adjacent office suites in Manhattan. From those offices, BARARUSHKIN and TOLSON arranged marriages between United States citizens and individuals from Romania, the Ukraine, Russia and other countries, so that the foreign nationals could apply for permanent resident status in the United States. In one instance, BARARUSHKIN required a

foreign national to pay approximately \$15,000 for a fraudulent marriage. In another instance, CRUZ explained to a United States citizen that the citizen would receive \$5,000 if he entered into a marriage for immigration purposes and then divorced after nine months.

In furtherance of the conspiracy, SANCHEZ prepared immigration applications and other paperwork on behalf of these foreign nationals in connection with their applications for permanent resident status based on the fraudulent marriages. On one occasion, BARARUSHKIN offered to create fraudulent documents that falsely claimed that the foreign national was abused by her spouse, so that she could obtain permanent resident status following the dissolution of the marriage. In an effort to make the fraudulent marriages appear legitimate, BARARUSHKIN, CRUZ and others instructed the participants in these marriages to open joint bank accounts, to obtain utility bills in both of their names, and to take photographs together.

The defendants, arrested earlier this morning, are expected to be presented in United States Magistrate Court this afternoon. If convicted, they each face a maximum sentence of 10 years' imprisonment. In addition, Count One of the Indictment carries a potential maximum fine of the greater of \$250,000, or twice the gross gain or loss from the crime. Count Two of the Indictment carries a potential maximum fine of \$250,000.

Mr. GARCIA praised the investigative work of both ICE and the DSS.

Assistant United States Attorney JENNA M. DABBS is 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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