



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JULY 16, 2009**

**CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
YUSILL SCRIBNER,
REBEKAH CARMICHAEL,
JANICE OH
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 637-2600**

**DEA
GARRISON COURTNEY
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(202) 307-2402**

**LEADER OF COLOMBIAN NARCO-TERRORIST GROUP EXTRADITED TO
UNITED STATES ON COCAINE IMPORTATION CHARGES**

LEV L. DASSIN, the Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and MICHELE M. LEONHART, Acting Administrator of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"), today announced that GERARDO AGUILAR RAMIREZ, a/k/a "Cesar," a former front commander in the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or "FARC"), has been extradited from Colombia to the United States to face cocaine importation conspiracy charges. The FARC, which has been designated by the U.S. State Department as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, is Colombia's main leftist rebel group. AGUILAR RAMIREZ was extradited on an Indictment, unsealed March 1, 2006, in the District of Columbia, in which the United States has levied charges against fifty of the top leaders of the FARC. According to the Indictment and documents filed by the United States in Colombian extradition proceedings:

The FARC, which occupies large swaths of territory in Colombia, is a hierarchical organization comprised of twelve to eighteen thousand 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: it 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. Before his capture on July 2, 2008, AGUILAR RAMIREZ was the commander of the FARC's 1st Front and ultimately responsible for all of that Front's criminal activities. In that capacity he conspired with others to, among other things, 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.

In the late 1990s, the FARC leadership 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.

Further, recognizing that the FARC could not survive without its cocaine revenue, the indicted members of the Secretariat and Estado Mayor directed its members to attack and disrupt coca eradication fumigation efforts, including shooting down fumigation aircrafts; forcing local farmers to participate in rallies against fumigation; and attacking Colombian infrastructure to force the Colombian Government to divert resources from fumigation. Recognizing that the United States has contributed significantly to Colombian fumigation efforts, the FARC leaders also ordered FARC members to kidnap and murder United States citizens in order to dissuade the United States from its continued efforts to fumigate and disrupt the FARC's cocaine manufacturing and distribution activities. In late 2001 or early 2002, AGUILAR RAMIREZ and other FARC leaders participated in a meeting at which they voted unanimously to encourage the kidnapping of United States citizens for that purpose. The meeting also resulted in resolutions to, among other things: increase cocaine trafficking routes overseas, including to the United States; establish better ways to exchange cocaine and cocaine paste for weapons; pay more to campesinos for cocaine paste; and to apply "Revolutionary Justice," including murder, to any campesino who failed to sell coca to the FARC.

AGUILAR RAMIREZ is also charged in a separate Indictment in a hostage-taking conspiracy involving four U.S. citizens -- MARC D. GONSALVES, THOMAS R. HOWES, KEITH D.

STANSELL, and TOM JANIS -- whose plane crashed in February 2003 in FARC-occupied territory in the Colombian jungle. The four were captured by the FARC; JANIS was executed, and the remaining three were led into captivity, held hostage for over five years until their rescue on July 2, 2008. AGUILAR RAMIREZ was captured at that time while holding the three American hostages. The Colombian Supreme Court has not approved AGUILAR RAMIREZ's extradition on these charges, however; it has only approved his extradition on the narcotics conspiracy charges, and therefore AGUILAR RAMIREZ will be tried only on those narcotics charges.

AGUILAR RAMIREZ, 50, is scheduled to be presented tomorrow at 10:30 a.m. in District of Columbia federal court before United States District Judge THOMAS F. HOGAN. Co-defendants ERMINSO CUEVAS CABRERA, a/k/a "Mincho," JORGE ENRIQUE RODRIGUEZ MENDIETA, a/k/a "Ivan Vargas," and JUAN JOSE MARTINEZ VEGA, a/k/a "Chiguiro," were previously extradited on the Indictment, and are currently scheduled for trial beginning January 5, 2010. Special Assistant United States Attorneys from the Southern District of New York are prosecuting the case in the District of Columbia.

The State Department has offered \$75 million in rewards for information leading to the arrest of the highest-ranking FARC leadership defendants, who remain fugitives.

"The FARC's terrorist and cocaine-trafficking activities pose an extraordinarily grave threat to the people of Colombia and the United States," said Acting United States Attorney DASSIN. We are committed, together with Colombian authorities and United States law enforcement agencies, to attacking FARC's criminal leadership. The extradition of Aguilar Ramirez, alleged to be a high-level FARC commander, is another milestone in this Office's fight against narco-terrorism worldwide."

"Today's extradition of Aguilar Ramirez continues our unwavering commitment to bring to justice leaders of this violent narco-terrorist organization," said DEA Acting Administrator MICHELE M. LEONHART. Aguilar Ramirez is alleged, as commander of one of the FARC's most dangerous fronts, to have participated in decisions to kidnap Americans and to attack the Colombian infrastructure in support of the FARC's massive narco-terrorism operations. He will now face justice."

The investigation resulting in these charges was led by the International Narcotics Trafficking Unit of 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 United States Drug Enforcement Administration, 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. DASSIN praised all the law enforcement partners involved in the investigation, and thanked the Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs, as well as Criminal Division's Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section attachés in Bogota for their involvement in the extradition process.

Assistant United States Attorneys ERIC SNYDER, PABLO QUIÑONES and RANDALL JACKSON are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely allegations. All defendants are presumed innocent unless and until convicted in a court of law.

09-220

###