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**TOP FARC COMMANDER SENTENCED TO 27 YEARS IN PRISON FOR
CONSPIRING TO IMPORT TONS OF COCAINE
INTO THE UNITED STATES**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and JOHN P. GILBRIDE, the Special Agent-in-Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's New York Field Division ("DEA"), 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"), was sentenced today to 27 years in prison for conspiring to import ton-quantities of cocaine into the United States. The FARC -- which has been designated by the U.S. State Department as a Foreign Terrorist Organization -- is Colombia's main leftist rebel group and is the world's leading cocaine manufacturer, responsible for the production of nearly two-thirds of the cocaine imported into the United States. AGUILAR RAMIREZ was sentenced by United States District Judge THOMAS F. HOGAN in District of Columbia federal court.

According to the Superseding Indictment filed in District of Columbia federal court, other documents filed in this case, and statements made in court:

The FARC, which occupies large swaths of territory in Colombia, is a hierarchical organization which, at its height during the time of the conspiracy, was comprised of 12,000 to 18,000 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."

AGUILAR RAMIREZ was the commander of the FARC's 1st Front and was ultimately responsible for all of that Front's criminal activities. Among other things, AGUILAR RAMIREZ

conspired with others to 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 late 2001 or early 2002, the FARC leadership, including AGUILAR RAMIREZ, participated in a meeting in which they further resolved, among other things, to: increase cocaine trafficking routes overseas, including to the United States; establish better ways to exchange cocaine and cocaine paste for weapons; and to pay more to campesinos for cocaine paste.

AGUILAR RAMIREZ was captured on July 2, 2008, while holding three American hostages - KEITH STANSELL, THOMAS HOWES, and MARC GONSALVES. These three men, and United States citizen TOM JANIS, were captured by the FARC in February 2003, after their plane crashed in FARC-occupied territory in the Colombian jungle. JANIS was executed, and the remaining three men were held hostage by the FARC for over five years until they, and several Colombian hostages, were freed in a Colombian military operation on the date of AGUILAR RAMIREZ's capture.

Subsequently, on July 16, 2009, AGUILAR RAMIREZ, 50, was extradited to the United States. AGUILAR RAMIREZ was originally charged in a hostage-taking conspiracy as well as a narcotics importation conspiracy, but the Colombian Supreme Court approved AGUILAR RAMIREZ's extradition on narcotics charges only.

On December 16, 2009, during his guilty plea proceeding, AGUILAR RAMIREZ acknowledged that from approximately 1998 through July 2, 2008, he was the commander of the 1st Front of the FARC and that he led and directed other members of the 1st Front in the manufacture and distribution of ton quantities of cocaine, knowing and intending that the cocaine would be imported into the United States.

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Manhattan U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA stated: "Today, Gerardo Aguilar Ramirez -- a FARC commander and cocaine kingpin -- was brought to justice for his role in leading the FARC's worldwide cocaine empire. The incarceration of narco-terrorists like Aguilar Ramirez helps to choke the international drug trade. This Office will continue to work with our partners at the DEA to incapacitate dangerous narco-terrorists who seek to pour drugs into the United States."

DEA Special Agent-in-Charge JOHN P. GILBRIDE stated:
"Gerardo Aguilar Ramirez conspired to manufacture and distribute thousands of kilograms of cocaine in the United States to fuel the FARC's narco-terrorist mission. Ramirez violently commanded the 1st Front for over 10 years until his arrest and today he has been sentenced and will pay for his crimes against American and Colombian citizens who have seen the damages of cocaine trafficking and abuse throughout both our nations. I commend the diligent and brave work of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, the Organized Crime Strike Force, DEA's Bogota Country Office, and the Colombian government."

The investigation resulting in these charges was led by the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, working with the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force (which consists of agents and officers from the DEA, 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 government. Mr. BHARARA praised all the law enforcement partners involved in the investigation, and thanked the Department of Justice 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.

This case is being prosecuted in the District of Columbia by the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. Special Assistant United States Attorneys PABLO QUIÑONES and RANDALL JACKSON, of the Office's Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit, are in charge of the prosecution.

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