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**LEADER OF INTERNATIONAL DRUG-TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION
SENTENCED IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT TO 210 MONTHS
IN PRISON FOR COCAINE TRAFFICKING THROUGH WEST AFRICA**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and MICHELE M. LEONHART, the Acting Administrator of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"), announced today that JESUS EDUARDO VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ, a/k/a "Padre," a/k/a "Pat," was sentenced to 210 months in prison for leading a drug-trafficking organization that used countries in West Africa to distribute ton-quantities of cocaine throughout the world. United States District Judge ROBERT P. PATTERSON imposed the sentence today in Manhattan federal court.

VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ, 45, was arrested on June 10, 2009, in Bucharest, Romania, where he attended a meeting concerning the expansion of his organization's operations in West Africa. He was subsequently extradited to the United States and arrived in the Southern District of New York. VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ pleaded guilty on April 20, 2010, to one count of conspiracy to distribute cocaine intended for importation into the United States.

According to the Superseding Indictment, statements made during VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ's guilty plea proceeding, and other documents filed in this case:

VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ led a sophisticated international cocaine trafficking organization (the "Organization") based in Colombia and Venezuela that operated worldwide, including in Bolivia, Spain, Holland, Sierra Leone, Guinea Conakry, Mauritania, Mali, Cyprus, and the United States. Beginning in

September 2007, members of the Organization sought to purchase a cargo airplane for the purpose of transporting metric tons of cocaine from Venezuela to West Africa. Between September 2007 and March 2009, MANUEL SILVA-JARAMILLO, a member of the Organization arrested in 2009, conducted meetings in connection with the Organization's efforts to acquire the airplane in, among other places, Madrid, Spain, New York, and Virginia. SILVA-JARAMILLO arranged to finance the purchase of the airplane through a corporation based in Cyprus and to register it in Sierra Leone.

In a meeting in Europe in October 2007, SILVA-JARAMILLO delivered more than 1.25 million Euros in cash -- drug proceeds that represented a partial payment towards the airplane -- which he instructed were to be wire-transferred to different bank accounts in the United States. During one of these meetings, which was recorded, SILVA-JARAMILLO stated that the Organization had between 30 and 60 million Euros in Spain that it needed to launder.

In November 2008, VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ met in Madrid, Spain, with a DEA confidential source who was assisting SILVA-JARAMILLO with the acquisition of the airplane. During this meeting, VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ identified himself as a leader of the Organization and stated that it enjoyed land support and a private military airfield in Guinea Conakry, located in West Africa, where the Organization could deliver cocaine shipments originating from Venezuela. VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ also indicated that although he understood the airplane to be capable of carrying seven tons of cocaine at a time, the Organization wanted to start with shipments of two to three tons.

In January 2009, VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ met again with the confidential source in Europe. Among other things, VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ stated that the Organization was investigating the possibility of flying shipments of cocaine from Bolivia to West Africa. On the following day, VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ arranged the delivery of 250,000 Euros in cash to the confidential source, which represented an additional payment toward the purchase of the airplane. Thereafter, in the course of the negotiations regarding the purchase of the airplane, Valencia-Arbelaez agreed that a 100-kilogram shipment of cocaine belonging to the Organization would be shipped to New York as partial payment for the airplane.

On June 10, 2009, VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ traveled to Bucharest, Romania, to attend a meeting concerning the Organization's establishment of a new base of operations. Acting

on a provisional arrest request from the United States, Romanian law enforcement authorities arrested VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ in Bucharest, whereupon he was detained pending extradition to New York.

SILVA-JARAMILLO previously pleaded guilty to related charges and is awaiting sentencing.

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The arrest and extradition of VALENCIA-ARBELAEZ were the result of the close cooperative efforts of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, the DEA, the Department of State, the U.S. Department of Justice's Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs, the Romanian National Police, the Danish National Police, and the Republic of Liberia.

United States Attorney PREET BHARARA stated:
"International narcotics trafficking networks have increasingly sought to use West Africa as a hub for their illegal activities. But by operating on multiple continents and attempting to expand their criminal reach, drug smugglers make themselves vulnerable to the cooperative law enforcement efforts of the United States and its partners around the world. Today, Jesus Eduardo Valencia-Arbelaez faces the stark consequences of exploiting the countries of West Africa for his own enrichment."

DEA Acting Administrator MICHELE M. LEONHART stated:
"Today's sentencing of cocaine kingpin Jesus Eduardo Valencia-Arbelaez is a resounding victory for the rule of international law. We have locked behind bars one of the world's top drug traffickers who orchestrated massive cocaine smuggling operations from South America, through western Africa, to Europe and the United States. This global success was only made possible by outstanding cooperative efforts of the Romanian and Danish National Police forces, as well as the National Security Agency in Liberia."

Assistant United States Attorneys ANJAN SAHNI, BRENDAN R. McGUIRE, and REBECCA M. RICIGLIANO are in charge of the prosecution, which is being handled by the Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit.

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