



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

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CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
ELLEN DAVIS
JERIKA RICHARDSON
CARLY SULLIVAN
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 637-2600

**NIGERIAN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKER SENTENCED IN MANHATTAN
FEDERAL COURT TO 30 YEARS IN PRISON FOR CONSPIRING TO
IMPORT MORE THAN \$100 MILLION WORTH OF COCAINE INTO THE
UNITED STATES**

*First Defendant To Be Sentenced In Connection With Historic Joint
Undercover Operation Between The United States And
The Government of Liberia*

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today that CHIGBO PETER UMEH was sentenced in Manhattan federal court to years in prison for conspiring to import cocaine into the United States. He was found guilty in April 2011, after a three-week jury trial before U.S. District Judge JED S. RAKOFF. UMEH's sentence is the culmination of a historic, joint undercover operation, "Operation Relentless," between the United States Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA") and the Government of Liberia.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA stated: "Chigbo Peter Umeh was the linchpin of a multi-million dollar narcotics distribution conspiracy between South America, West Africa and ultimately, the rest of the world. He thought he could use officials in the Liberian government to assist with his operations, but he was sorely mistaken. Today's sentence is a fitting coda to the final chapter in the prosecution of this dangerous narcotics broker -- a result that would not have been possible without the courage and cooperation of the Government of Liberia and the DEA agents who conceived of and then executed this bold undercover operation."

According to the trial evidence and other documents filed in the case:

UMEH, who is from Nigeria, was a broker who facilitated the shipment of multi-ton quantities of cocaine from South America to West Africa, where it would then be transported to Europe or elsewhere within Africa.

UMEH attempted to bribe high-level officials within the Liberian Government in order to protect shipments of cocaine and to use the country as a trans-shipment point for its drug distribution operations. In particular, he met with two individuals he knew to be Liberian government officials -- the Director and Deputy Director of the Republic of Liberia National Security Agency ("RLNSA") -- both of whom were working jointly with the DEA in an undercover capacity. The Director of the RLNSA is also the son of the current President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

In a number of the meetings involving these Liberian officials, UMEH also met with a confidential source working with the DEA (the "CS"), who purported to be a business partner and confidante of the Director of the RLNSA. In seeking to ensure safe passage of the cocaine shipments, UMEH agreed to make payments in cash and cocaine to Liberian officials and to the CS. The CS advised UMEH that a portion of the cocaine paid to the CS would be transported from Liberia to Ghana, from where it would be imported into New York.

UMEH participated in a series of face-to-face meetings and phone conversations with the cooperating Liberian officials and the CS in connection with at least three different shipments of cocaine that they were trying to transport through Liberia: (1) a shipment of approximately 4,000 kilograms with a retail value of over \$100 million that was to be flown from Venezuela to Monrovia, Liberia; (2) a shipment of approximately 1,500 kilograms, which was to be flown from Venezuela to Monrovia, Liberia, on an aircraft originating in Panama; and (3) a shipment of approximately 500 kilograms of cocaine, which was to be transported by a ship from Venezuela to a location off the coast of Liberia. Through these meetings, UMEH understood that once the cocaine was transported to Liberia, a portion of the shipment -- representing the payment to the CS -- would be transported into Ghana, from where it would be placed on a commercial flight destined for the United States.

During a meeting in Monrovia, UMEH stated that the 4,000 kilograms of cocaine that the conspirators intended to import into Liberia had been supplied and protected by the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (the "FARC"). The FARC is a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist group dedicated to the violent overthrow of the democratically elected Government of Colombia.

On May 29, 2010, UMEH was arrested in Liberia. He was transferred by the Government of Liberia to the custody of

the DEA to face trafficking charges in the Southern District of New York. KONSTANTIN YAROSHENKO, JORGE IVAN SALAZAR CASTANO, MARCEL ACEVEDO SARMIENTO, NATHANIEL FRENCH and KUDUFIA MAWUKO were also charged with UMEH. YAROSHENKO was convicted at trial along with UMEH, while FRENCH and MAWUKO were acquitted. SALAZAR CASTANO is incarcerated in Spain, and ACEVEDO SARMIENTO is in Colombia. They are both awaiting extradition to the United States.

Mr. BHARARA praised the work of the Special Operations Division of DEA, the DEA Lagos Country Office, the DEA Warsaw Country Office, the DEA Bogota Country Office, the DEA Rome Country Office, the U.S. Department of Justice Office of International Affairs, and the U.S. State Department. He also thanked the U.S. Embassy in Liberia, the Republic of Liberia and its National Security Agency, and the Security Services of Ukraine for their efforts.

This prosecution is being handled by the Office's Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys CHRISTOPHER LAVIGNE, RANDALL JACKSON, MICHAEL M. ROSENSAFT, and JENNA M. DABBS are in charge of the prosecution.

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