



*United States Attorney  
Southern District of New York*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 21, 2006

CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
HERBERT HADAD, MEGAN GAFFNEY  
HEATHER TASKER, BRIDGET KELLY  
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE  
(212) 637-2600

**U.S. ANNOUNCES TAKEDOWN OF COLOMBIAN NARCOTICS-  
TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION RESPONSIBLE FOR SMUGGLING  
MASSIVE QUANTITIES OF HEROIN INTO THE UNITED STATES**

*U.S. and Colombian Authorities Coordinate Arrest of  
56 Members and Associates of Enterprise Charged in Manhattan  
Federal Court; Authorities Seize \$25 Million Worth Of Heroin and  
\$3 Million in Cash, Jewelry, and Luxury Cars*

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and JOHN P. GILBRIDE, the Special Agent in Charge of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA") in New York, along with RAYMOND W. KELLY, Police Commissioner of New York City Police Department, and WAYNE E. BENNETT, Superintendent of the New York State Police (working collectively as the New York City Drug Enforcement Task Force (the "DEA Task Force")), announced today the coordinated takedown of an international heroin-trafficking organization responsible for smuggling tens of millions of dollars worth of heroin from Colombia into New York City. Earlier this morning, Colombian authorities executed on behalf of the United States provisional arrest warrants against nine leaders of the organization who controlled the heroin supply from Cali, Colombia. Colombian authorities also arrested 12 additional associates of the criminal organization on local Colombian heroin charges. The DEA Task Force simultaneously arrested nine additional members of the enterprise in New York City and Florida. The DEA Task Force has previously arrested 26 members and associates of the organization, all of whom are being prosecuted in Manhattan federal court. During the investigation, the DEA Task Force and Colombian authorities, assisted by officers with the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, in Florida, seized more than 250 pounds of the organization's heroin -- worth more than \$25 million -- that was destined for New York City streets.

According to an indictment and complaint unsealed today (collectively, the "Charging Documents"), the criminal organization used highly-sophisticated smuggling methods to bring its heroin into the United States and ultimately to New York City. Among other methods, the members of the organization secreted heroin inside furniture shipments, the soles of sandals, and golf bags, and also used human couriers to transport heroin pellets to the U.S. on board commercial airliners. Some of these smuggling methods are depicted in the attached photographs of a portion of the \$25 million worth of heroin seized by law enforcement during the investigation.

According to the Charging Documents, the investigation that culminated today began in the Summer of 2004 when Colombian authorities -- responding to an anonymous tip on a heroin "hot line" set up by the DEA and Colombian law enforcement -- seized more than 50 pounds of heroin in Cali, Colombia. During a two-year investigation, the DEA Task Force, DEA's Bogota, Colombia office, and Colombian authorities gathered evidence against the nine leaders of the organization based in Cali, Colombia, who controlled the heroin supply, as well as 12 associates of the enterprise who worked with the heroin suppliers. According to the Charging Documents, the DEA Task Force also identified the organization's New York City-based cells -- one led by ROBERTO SOTO-BELTRAN and eight associates; another led by JAIME LONDONO and 10 associates -- who were responsible for receiving shipments of heroin from Colombia and then distributing the narcotics to the organization's retail operations in the Bronx, New York. The enterprise's Bronx-based retail business was led by JOSE RODRIGUEZ NIEVES, a/k/a "Cuba," and 14 associates. Today, 56 members of this powerful heroin trafficking organization are in custody as a result of the coordinated efforts of the DEA Task Force and Colombian authorities.

In addition to dismantling the Colombian supply side of the organization, and arresting members of the U.S.-based distribution cells, the DEA Task Force, in January and February 2005, dismantled the retail operations of the organization allegedly led by JOSE RODRIGUEZ NIEVES in the Bronx, New York. During this phase of the investigation, the DEA Task Force identified RODRIGUEZ NIEVES' stash houses in the Bronx and heroin mills in Queens, and seized packaged heroin destined for New York City streets, as well as more than 20 "stamps" used to brand the heroin for sale. According to the Charging Documents, after RODRIGUEZ NIEVES and the 14 members of his retail crew were arrested, the DEA Task Force seized approximately \$3 million in profits from the heroin sales in the form of United States

Currency and watches, jewelry, and luxury cars that RODRIGUEZ NIEVES had purchased. Photographs of the heroin, stamps, and United States Currency, watches, and jewelry recovered by the DEA Task Force are attached.

The 30 arrests in Colombia and the United States announced today culminate "Operation Double Identity," a DEA Task Force-led international law enforcement operation involving cooperation between United States authorities, acting under the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force ("OCDETF"), and the Colombian National Police Dijin Unit in Cali, Colombia, working alongside DEA's Bogota Resident Office. The investigation was also assisted by officers with the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, in Florida.

If convicted, all the charged defendants face a maximum sentence of life imprisonment and a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years' imprisonment on the heroin-trafficking charges. Based on the terms of the extradition arrangement between the United States and Colombia, the United States will provide assurances to Colombia that it will not seek a life sentence with respect to the nine leaders of the organization provisionally arrested today. RODRIGUEZ NIEVES and a number of the members of his retail cell also face an additional mandatory sentence of five years' imprisonment, and in some cases additional terms of incarceration, for various firearms charges.

Mr. GARCIA praised the investigative efforts of the DEA Task Force, the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, and Colombian authorities.

The prosecutions are being handled by three Units of the United States Attorney's Office -- the International Narcotics Unit, the Narcotics Unit, and the Violent Crimes Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys DANIEL STEIN, CHRISTINE MEDING, KATHERINE GOLDSTEIN, and REED BRODSKY are in charge of the prosecutions.

The charges contained in the Charging Documents unsealed today are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

06-090

###