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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 29, 2007

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**CURACAO-BASED COCAINE TRAFFICKERS ENTER GUILTY PLEAS
IN MASSIVE COCAINE DISTRIBUTION CONSPIRACY**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that JAMES YEZID VALENCIA RUGELES, 64, along with his two sons, MARIO ALBERTO VALENCIA MUNEVAR, 40, and JAMES JESUS VALENCIA MUNEVAR, 41, pleaded guilty yesterday in Manhattan federal court to cocaine distribution conspiracy charges. The three had been arrested in Curacao, the Netherlands Antilles, in March 2004, and were extradited to the United States in October 2005. They entered their guilty pleas before United States District Judge JOHN G. KOELTL. According to the Indictment to which they pleaded guilty:

The VALENCIAS ran a massive cocaine smuggling organization (the "Valencia Organization") that received thousands of kilograms of cocaine in Curacao, which they would then transport northward to St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles, before eventual importation into Puerto Rico and the continental United States, including New York.

The Valencia Organization received its cocaine after it traveled, by container ship and high-speed motorboat, from the northern coasts of Venezuela and Colombia. The northern coast of Venezuela is approximately 24 nautical miles south of Curacao. The Valencia Organization paid corrupt law enforcement officials in Curacao to provide security, including serving as look-outs in Curacao when a shipment of cocaine was scheduled to arrive and providing information to the Valencia Organization about law enforcement's interdiction efforts so that the Valencia Organization could avoid detection and interception of the loads of narcotics. After the cocaine arrived in Curacao, the Valencia Organization arranged for its shipment to St. Maarten, where it was stored until it was eventually shipped to Puerto Rico and the continental United States. Payment for the cocaine would be

received in United States currency which was transported back to Curacao by, among other means, human couriers. The Valencia Organization was involved in a shipment of 2345 kilograms of cocaine sent from Venezuela to Curacao in October 2003.

The charge to which the three defendants pleaded guilty carries a ten-year mandatory minimum sentence, a potential maximum sentence of life imprisonment, and a \$4 million fine. Judge KOELTL scheduled sentencing proceedings for each defendant for September 28, 2007.

Mr. GARCIA praised the investigative efforts of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, the Korps Politie Curacao, the Recherché Samenwerkingsteam, and the Coast Guard of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba.

This prosecution is being handled by the International Narcotics Trafficking Unit of the United States Attorney's Office. Assistant United States Attorneys NEIL M. BAROFKSY and KEVIN R. PUVALOWSKI are in charge of the prosecution.

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