



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JUNE 12, 2009**

**CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
YUSILL SCRIBNER,
REBEKAH CARMICHAEL,
JANICE OH
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 637-2600**

**DEA
GWEN PHILLIPS
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
(202) 307-7977**

**FIVE ARRESTED IN PLOT TO MURDER
U.S. FEDERAL AGENT IN COLOMBIA**

Organization Was At "War With The DEA"

LEV L. DASSIN, the Acting 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 the arrests of five members of a Colombian narcotics trafficking organization on charges of conspiring to murder a U.S. DEA Agent stationed in Colombia, and to import methamphetamine into the United States.

JAVIER MAURICIO VASQUEZ SALDARRIAGA, a/k/a "Carlos", 34, EDGAR ABDON LUNA DIAZ, a/k/a "El Tio", 47, PABLO CESAR RUIZ CALDERON, a/k/a "RR", 31, CARLOS ALEXANDER SILVA BALTAN, a/k/a "Alex", 31, and LILIANA ESPERANZA RESFA VELEZ MUNOZ, 40, were arrested yesterday in Panama by Panamanian authorities and expelled to the United States for prosecution. According to the Complaint unsealed today in Manhattan federal court:

During discussions in Colombia regarding the purchase of 240 barrels of ephedrine (a precursor to methamphetamine) in May and June 2009, the defendants hatched a plot to murder a suspected DEA informant and the DEA agent assigned to supervise the informant. BALTAN described the DEA agent's vehicle and stated that he and his co-conspirators were going to "erase [the agent and informant] from the map," and that the agent would be

the first to die. Unbeknownst to the conspirators, one of the participants in their discussions was a confidential source ("CS") who was providing information to the DEA's Bogota, Colombia Office.

During a May 19 meeting at the home of MUNOZ, CALDERON wrote out a list of the names of several individuals whom the defendants were planning to murder, including the DEA agent -- who was identified by first name -- the informant, and family members of the informant. During this meeting, CALDERON and BALTAN told the CS that their narcotics organization was actively attempting to locate and murder the individuals on the handwritten list, including the DEA agent.

On May 29, the defendants met with the CS again. During this meeting, which was recorded, the CS claimed he had lost the previously-provided list of murder targets, and SALDARRIAGA handed the CS a duplicate list of the names. Again, the DEA agent's first name was on the list. BALTAN explained that the defendants' organization intended to murder the agent in retaliation for a narcotics seizure by Colombian authorities in Buenaventura, Colombia, during which a shootout occurred and some of BALTAN's friends were killed by foreign law enforcement. BALTAN stated that because of this event, his organization was at "war with the DEA."

The defendants traveled to Panama yesterday to meet with the CS regarding the murder plot and ephedrine transaction. There, the defendants were arrested, expelled from Panama, and transported by the DEA to the Southern District of New York for prosecution.

If convicted, SALDARRIAGA, DIAZ, CALDERON, BALTAN, and MUNOZ each faces a maximum term of life in prison for conspiracy to murder an officer of the United States, and a maximum term of life in prison and a mandatory minimum sentence of ten years in prison for conspiracy to import methamphetamine. Two defendants charged in the Complaint remain at large.

"This case highlights the danger that our colleagues in law enforcement face every day in the line of duty," said Acting U.S. Attorney LEV L. DASSIN. "We are fortunate that the DEA put a stop to this plot before it could unfold, and gratified to play a part in protecting officers of the United States from violent retaliation by the criminals they investigate."

"These arrests demonstrate that the agents and officers who protect all of us from violent criminal organizations and those who traffic in dangerous narcotics do not go in harm's way alone," said DEA Acting Administrator MICHELE M. LEONHART. "Rather, when they themselves are threatened with attack, the entire criminal justice system of the United States and our trusted international partners stand ready to respond to prevent further harm, and we will hold fully accountable those foolhardy enough to attack our agents or officers."

Mr. DASSIN praised the outstanding investigative work of the DEA's New York Drug Enforcement Task Force -- which is comprised of agents and officers of the DEA, New York City Police Department, and New York State Police -- Bogota Country Office, and Panama City Country Office. Mr. DASSIN also thanked the Panamanian National Police, the Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs and the Bogota, Colombia Judicial Attaché's Office for their assistance in the investigation.

The prosecution is being handled by the Office's International Narcotics Trafficking Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys JENNA M. DABBS and BENJAMIN A. NAFTALIS are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Complaint are merely accusations and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

09-183

###