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**MANHATTAN U.S. ATTORNEY ANNOUNCES UNSEALING OF CHARGES  
ARISING FROM HISTORIC JOINT UNDERCOVER OPERATION IN  
THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA**

*DEA's "Operation Relentless" Culminates In Arrest Of Eight  
Defendants For Conspiring To Use Liberia As Staging Area For  
Distribution Of More Than \$100 Million Worth Of Cocaine*

*Son Of President Of Liberia Acts As Undercover In Investigation*

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 that five defendants -- CHIGBO PETER UMEH, a/k/a "Emeka Okonkwo," a/k/a "Chigbogu Umehwunne," a/k/a "Mike," a/k/a "Chibue," a/k/a "El Negro," KONSTANTIN YAROSHENKO, GILBRILLA KAMARA, a/k/a/ "Gibril Kamara," a/k/a "Anthony Smith," a/k/a "GK," a/k/a "Gibry," a/k/a "Gee Wee," a/k/a "River Stallon," ALI SESAY, a/k/a "Aliue Sesay," a/k/a "Alie Sesay," and GENNOR JALLOH, a/k/a "Chernoh Nuhu Jalloh" -- arrived in the Southern District of New York from Liberia on May 30, 2010, to face charges of conspiring to import cocaine into the United States. The defendants, who were arrested in coordination with Liberian authorities on May 28 and 29, 2010, were transferred by the Government of Liberia to the custody of the United States to face narcotics trafficking charges in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. This marks the first defendant transfer by the Government of Liberia to the United States in connection with narcotics-related charges in over 30 years.

Two additional defendants -- NATHANIEL FRENCH, a/k/a "The Frenchman," a/k/a "The Expert," and KUDUFIA MAWUKO, a/k/a "Marco" -- were arrested by Liberian authorities this morning. They are expected to be transferred to United States custody shortly. One additional defendant -- JORGE IVAN SALAZAR CASTANO, a/k/a "El Chavel" -- was previously arrested in Spain, and remains in Spanish custody.

The defendants have been charged in two Indictments that were unsealed today. The first Indictment -- S8 09 Cr. 524 -- charges five defendants: UMEH, YAROSHENKO, FRENCH, MAWUKO, and JORGE IVAN SALAZAR CASTANO, a/k/a "El Chavel." The second Indictment, which bears docket number 10 Cr. 457, charges three defendants: KAMARA, SESAY, and JALLOH. Also unsealed today was a Complaint -- 10 Mag. 1166 -- which charges one defendant, MARCEL ACEVEDO SARMIENTO, a/k/a "Jota," a/k/a "JJ," a/k/a "Juan Restrepo," who is alleged to have been a co-conspirator of the conspiracy charged in Indictment S8 09 Cr. 524. ACEVEDO SARMIENTO remains at large.

According to the Indictments and Complaint unsealed today:

During the last decade, drug trafficking organizations based in South America have increasingly used countries along or near the West African coast as trans-shipment hubs for importing massive quantities of cocaine to be later distributed in Europe or elsewhere within Africa. Through a combination of privately owned aircraft and maritime vessels, these organizations, predominantly based in Colombia and Venezuela, have transported hundreds of tons of cocaine, worth billions of dollars, to places such as Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Sierra Leone, Togo, Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, and Liberia. In so doing, representatives of these drug trafficking organizations have often sought to bribe high-level public officials with large cash payments and narcotics in order to ensure the safe passage, storage, and distribution of their cocaine shipments.

Since in or about 2007, the defendants have attempted to bribe high-level officials in the Liberian Government in order to protect shipments of vast quantities of cocaine, and to use Liberia as a trans-shipment point for further distribution of the cocaine in Africa and Europe. In particular, certain of the defendants met with two individuals they knew to be Liberian government officials -- the Director and Deputy Director of the Republic of Liberia National Security Agency ("RLNSA"), both of whom (unbeknownst to the defendants) in fact were working jointly

with the DEA in an undercover capacity ("UC-1" and "UC-2", respectively).

The Director of the RLNSA is also the son of the current President of Liberia. In a number of the meetings involving these Liberian officials, the defendants also met with a confidential source working with DEA (the "CS"), who purported to be a business partner and confidante of the Director of the RLNSA.

In seeking to ensure the safe passage of their cocaine shipments, the defendants agreed to make payments to the Director and the Deputy Director of the RLNSA in cash and also in the form of cocaine. The CS advised the defendants 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.

#### The S8 09 Cr. 524 Indictment

According to the S8 09 Cr. 524 Indictment, UMEH, 42, who is from Nigeria, was a broker who assisted various international narcotics suppliers in shipping numerous tons of cocaine from South America to West Africa, from where the cocaine was transported to Europe or elsewhere within Africa. SALAZAR CASTANO, 44, who is from Colombia, was a cocaine supplier based in Colombia and Spain, who, together with his co-conspirators, sent large commercial aircraft containing cocaine from South America to West Africa, as well as smaller, private airplanes that departed from clandestine airstrips in Venezuela. YAROSHENKO, 41, who is from Russia, was an aircraft pilot and aviation transport expert who transported thousand-kilogram quantities of cocaine throughout South America, Africa, and Europe. FRENCH, 51, who is from Ghana, assisted drug suppliers by providing logistical support and coordination for maritime shipments of cocaine across the Atlantic Ocean. MAWUKO, 57, who is also from Ghana, assisted the drug suppliers through his extensive knowledge of maritime navigation, including the development of sea routes that could evade law enforcement radar.

The defendants participated in a series of face-to-face meetings, phone conversations, and telephone calls 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, which was to be flown from Venezuela to Monrovia, Liberia, and the retail value of which was over \$100 million; (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, the defendants all 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 which the conspiracy intended to import into Liberia had been supplied and protected by the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (the "FARC"). The FARC is an international terrorist group dedicated to the violent overthrow of the democratically elected Government of Colombia.

On May 28 and 29, 2010, defendants UMEH and YAROSHENKO were arrested in Liberia. On May 30, 2010, they were transferred to United States custody and brought to the Southern District of New York, where they will make their first court appearance later today. Defendants FRENCH and MAWUKO were arrested in Liberia this morning, June 1, 2010, and are expected to be transferred to United States custody shortly. Defendant SALAZAR CASTANO is presently incarcerated in Spain.

The S8 09 Cr. 524 Indictment has been assigned to United States District Judge JED S. RAKOFF for the Southern District of New York.

#### The 10 Cr. 457 Indictment

As set forth in Indictment 10 Cr. 457, since at least in or about 2007, KAMARA, 40, who is from Sierra Leone, has actively sought to recruit South American drug trafficking organizations to establish operations in various West African countries, including in Liberia, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria. KAMARA has made efforts to corrupt and influence Government officials within the West African region in order to establish safe havens for the receipt, storage, and trans-shipment of thousands of kilograms of cocaine. JALLOH, 33, and SESAY, both of whom are also from Sierra Leone, have assisted KAMARA with his drug distribution enterprise and with his efforts to corrupt public officials for the benefit of South American drug trafficking organizations.

KAMARA, JALLOH, and SESAY exchanged a series of emails and telephone calls and held numerous meetings with the CS, the cooperating Liberian officials, and a third Liberian government

official who was also working jointly with the DEA in an undercover capacity ("UC-3"), in order to negotiate prices and make specific arrangements for the secure transportation of cocaine from South America through Liberia, including, but not limited to, a 4,000 kilogram shipment of cocaine from Colombia. The CS, who was introduced as UC-1's "partner" and confidante, was present for many of these meetings. In the course of these meetings, the defendants understood that the CS, who was to be paid by the defendants in the form of cocaine, was going to send a portion of his share of the cocaine to Ghana, from where it would be imported into New York aboard commercial flights.

In coordination with Liberian authorities, KAMARA, JALLOH, and SESAY were arrested on May 28, 2010. On May 30, 2010, they were transferred to United States custody and brought to the Southern District of New York, where they will make their first court appearance later today.

The 10 Cr. 457 Indictment has been assigned to United States District Judge WILLIAM H. PAULEY for the Southern District of New York.

#### The 10 Mag. 1166 Complaint

As set forth in Complaint 10 Mag. 1166, ACEVEDO SARMIENTO is a cocaine supplier based in Colombia and Venezuela, capable of transporting thousand-kilogram quantities of cocaine from South America to various locations in West Africa, for distribution within Africa and for further distribution to Europe and other markets. ACEVEDO SARMIENTO worked in the international drug business with members of the conspiracy charged in the S8 09 Cr. 524 Indictment, including in connection with the 4,000 kilogram shipment of cocaine referenced therein.

In a series of recorded telephone conversations with the CS, ACEVEDO SARMIENTO, who claimed to have been involved in the cocaine trafficking business for over 20 years, coordinated efforts to arrange what was ultimately supposed to be a shipment of between 2,000 and 2,500 kilograms of cocaine on a plane from Venezuela to Liberia. ACEVEDO SARMIENTO confirmed to the CS that the cocaine shipment had been protected by the FARC.

On May 29, 2010, ACEVEDO SARMIENTO indicated that Venezuelan authorities had seized his plane, which he claimed was worth \$35 million, as well as the cocaine that it contained, and had directed him to leave the country. After apprising the CS of the seizure, ACEVEDO SARMIENTO invited the CS to invest 500 kilograms in a new shipment out of Bolivia, which ACEVEDO

SARMIENTO understood the CS intended to import into New York. ACEVEDO SARMIENTO instructed the CS to wire transfer a \$100,000 payment to him, and provided the CS with the relevant bank account information for the transfer.

The United States is coordinating with Colombian authorities to locate and apprehend ACEVEDO SARMIENTO.

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All of the defendants are charged with one count of conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute cocaine, knowing or intending that the cocaine would be imported into the United States. This offense carries a minimum sentence of ten years in prison and a maximum term of life imprisonment.

The arrests and transfers of the defendants were the result of the close cooperative efforts of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, the Special Operations Division of the 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, the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Embassy in Liberia, the Republic of Liberia and its National Security Agency, and the Security Services of Ukraine.

United States Attorney PREET BHARARA stated: "During the last decade, South American narcotics traffickers have burrowed a growing foothold in West Africa, sending hundreds of tons of cocaine worth billions of dollars into the region. They have done so by seeking to influence and corrupt public officials with lucrative promises of payoffs. As today's charges vividly show, the Government of Liberia has taken an aggressive and emphatic stand in shutting its doors to drug traffickers. Liberia's commitment to the rule of the law and the international fight against the drug trade merits strong commendation. For the President of Liberia, this effort has been a personal one. Her own son, the Director of Liberia's National Security Agency, courageously served as an undercover to make this investigation and prosecution possible. The transfer of these defendants to American custody reflects the strong partnership between the United States and Liberia in combating the international drug trade, which poses a serious threat to both countries."

DEA Acting Administrator MICHELE M. LEONHART stated: "Unprecedented cooperation from the highest levels of government in Liberia helped expose drug smuggling and corruption that led

to indictments of African, Colombian, and Russian traffickers. Operation Relentless successfully battered the pipeline of cocaine flowing from South America, through Africa, and into Europe. In this case, ton quantities of FARC cocaine were seized and the operations of several major traffickers were disrupted."

The Honorable ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF, President of the Republic of Liberia, stated: "As today's charges show, the Republic of Liberia is officially closed for business to the narcotics trade. We are strongly committed to combating international drug organizations that seek to exploit our country for their own profit. We are proud of our strong partnership with the United States Drug Enforcement Administration and the United States Department of Justice, and we look forward to strengthening and deepening this relationship in the years to come."

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

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

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