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**TWO KEY PLAYERS IN INTERNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING
ORGANIZATION FOUND GUILTY IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT
OF NARCOTICS AND FIREARMS CHARGES**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that PLAURENT CELA and SKENDER CAKONI were found guilty yesterday in Manhattan federal court of narcotics conspiracy and firearms charges in connection with their participation in an international drug trafficking organization. As part of the organization, the defendants helped smuggle millions of dollars worth of marijuana into the United States, and used firearms to defend their marijuana business against a rival gang of drug dealers. CELA and CAKONI were convicted after a three-week trial presided over by U.S. District Judge RICHARD J. HOLWELL.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA said: "Plaurant Cela and Skender Cakoni flooded our neighborhoods with marijuana -- resorting to lethal violence when someone got in their way. With these convictions, they will now go to prison, and our streets will be that much safer as a result."

According to the Superseding Indictment filed in Manhattan federal court, other court documents, and statements made during related court proceedings:

Between 2003 and 2007, CELA, CAKONI, and others smuggled high-quality marijuana from Canada into the United States through the U.S.-Canadian border in Detroit. The group smuggled at least 500 pounds of marijuana during this five-year period, worth millions of dollars in street retail value.

In June 2005, when a rival group of drug dealers headed by BRUNO KRASNIQI and SAMIR KRASNIQI threatened the group's marijuana business, CELA, CAKONI, and others obtained handguns, a shotgun, and an Uzi sub-machine gun in order to kill them. As part of this drug dispute, an individual who aligned himself with CELA and CAKONI was kidnapped, and another individual was killed.

The trial against the KRASNIQI brothers and their associates is scheduled to begin on October 24, 2011, before Judge HOLWELL.

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Both CELA, 31, of Queens, New York, and CAKONI, 46, of Queens, New York, were convicted of one count of narcotics conspiracy and one count of using and carrying firearms in furtherance of drug trafficking. CELA faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. CAKONI faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 15 years and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

CELA and CAKONI are scheduled to be sentenced by Judge HOLWELL on September 23, 2011, at 12:00 p.m.

Mr. BHARARA praised the investigative work of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The case is being handled by the Office's Organized Crime Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys CHI T. STEVE KWOK, ARIANNA R. BERG, AVI WEITZMAN, and MICHAEL FERRARA are in charge of the prosecution.

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