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**MANHATTAN FEDERAL JURY CONVICTS BELIZEAN DRUG
TRAFFICKER WITH TIES TO COLOMBIAN TERRORIST
GROUP FOR THREATS TO KILL U.S. AGENTS ABROAD
AND COCAINE IMPORTATION**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and JOHN P. GILBRIDE, Special Agent in Charge of the New York Field Division of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"), announced that ROBERT JAMES HERTULAR, a multi-ton cocaine trafficker who claimed ties to a Colombian terrorist group, was found guilty today by a jury in Manhattan federal court on charges of threatening to kill Federal agents stationed in Belize, and conspiracy to import ton-quantities of cocaine into the United States.

HERTULAR was found guilty on all four counts of an indictment after a trial before the Honorable Naomi Reice Buchwald, United States District Judge. According to the testimony and evidence at trial, HERTULAR was first arrested in Belize in May 2001 after Belizean authorities seized a shipment of 1.1 tons of Colombian cocaine destined for the United States

via Mexico. In statements to Belizean police and DEA agents in 2001, HERTULAR claimed a drug-trafficking association with notorious paramilitary leader and cocaine trafficker Carlos Castano. (Before his disappearance and presumed murder in April 2004 this year, Castano was the head of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia ("AUC"), a right-wing paramilitary group designated by the State Department as a foreign terrorist organization.) HERTULAR also told Belizean officers that he had conducted four other cocaine shipments to the U.S. prior to his arrest in May 2001, each consisting of approximately 1.2 tons.

In December 2003 HERTULAR learned that he was facing indictment in the United States for his cocaine-trafficking activities. As recounted at the trial, HERTULAR approached the DEA in Belize in an effort to provide them with information in exchange for the DEA discontinuing its investigation. The DEA agents refused. HERTULAR then threatened that his drug organization would hire hitmen from Colombia and Mexico to kill the agents. The evidence at trial also established that HERTULAR had also threatened a Belizean law enforcement officer in 2001, and had offered a hand grenade to another Belizean, to be used against DEA agents, in April 2003. The other Belizean turned out to be a DEA informant, who reported HERTULAR's intentions.

The charges on which HERTULAR was found guilty today were filed in January 2004, shortly after his threats against the DEA

agents. On January 29, 2004, HERTULAR was arrested in Belize for extradition to the United States and on July 22, 2004, after protracted litigation in the Belizean courts, a Belizean judge ordered HERTULAR's extradition. HERTULAR was flown to White Plains Airport in White Plains, New York, the day after, July 23, 2004, in the custody of DEA agents.

HERTULAR is to be sentenced by Judge Buchwald on June 21, 2006. He faces a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, and a mandatory minimum sentence of ten years' imprisonment.

Mr. GARCIA praised the outstanding investigative efforts of the DEA's New York Drug Enforcement Task Force, its Belize Country Office, and its Mexico-Central America Division, as well as the Belize Police Department and the Belize Department of Public Prosecutions. Mr. GARCIA stated: "As law enforcement becomes an increasingly international effort, the safety of American agents stationed abroad is of paramount importance. As today's conviction makes clear, this Office is committed to pursuing and bringing to justice those who threaten the lives of American agents."

Assistant United States Attorneys JESSE FURMAN and ANIRUDH BANSAL are in charge of the prosecution.

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