



*United States Attorney  
Southern District of New York*

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**U.S. ANNOUNCES EXTRADITION OF COLOMBIAN DRUG  
KINGPIN RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPORTING MORE THAN  
\$100 MILLION WORTH OF NARCOTICS**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, JOHN P. GILBRIDE, Special Agent in Charge of the New York Field Division of the Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"), MARTIN FICKE, Special Agent in Charge of the New York Office of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") in New York, and MICHAEL THOMAS, Special Agent in Charge of the New York Office of the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigative Division ("IRS"), announced today the extradition and arraignment of JULIO CESAR LOPEZ-PENA a/k/a "Julito," a/k/a "J," a high-ranking member of the notorious Norte Valle Cartel in Colombia.

LOPEZ-PENA was formally extradited from Colombia on March 15, 2006 and will be arraigned later today before a United States Magistrate Judge in Courtroom 5A in Manhattan federal court.

In May 2004, the United States Attorney General announced the unsealing of racketeering and narcotics-importation charges against ten leaders of the Norte Valle Cartel for importing more than \$10 billion worth of cocaine into the United States since 1990. According to the Indictment, LOPEZ-PENA was responsible for importing thousands of kilograms of cocaine and kilogram quantities of heroin, worth an estimated \$100 million, into the United States since at least 1998.

According to the three-count Indictment and the United States request for extradition (the "Extradition Package"), beginning in 1998, LOPEZ-PENA operated a cocaine laboratory under the control of Norte Valle Cartel leader Wilmer Alirio Varela. At the laboratory, LOPEZ-PENA allegedly produced hundreds of kilograms of cocaine per week, a majority of which was sent to

the United States. Many of these cocaine shipments, which each contained between 1,500 and 1,800 kilograms of cocaine, were sent by boat from Colombia's west coast to Mexico and ultimately to the United States, it was charged.

The Indictment and the Extradition Package further allege that beginning in 2004, LOPEZ-PENA was also the leader of a criminal organization responsible for importing multi-kilogram quantities of heroin into the United States for distribution, using, among other methods, suitcases inside which the heroin was secreted. On two occasions during October 2004, in Miami, FL, and New York, NY, the DEA seized multi-kilogram quantities of heroin sent by LOPEZ-PENA and his co-conspirators from Colombia.

Following these two seizures, Colombian law enforcement officers, who were conducting judicially-authorized interceptions of conversations over several Colombian telephones used by LOPEZ-PENA's co-conspirators, intercepted conversations during which the Miami and New York heroin seizures were discussed, according to the Extradition Package. In those conversations, other co-conspirators referred to LOPEZ-PENA by his nicknames "Julito" and "J" as the leader of the heroin-trafficking organization. As charged in the Extradition Package, at the time of his arrest by Colombian law enforcement officers in 2005, LOPEZ-PENA was in possession of firearms.

The successful extradition announced today was the result of a joint investigation involving agents of the DEA, ICE, IRS, and other law enforcement agencies as part of the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force's (OCDEF) Strike Force (the "New York Strike Force") and Colombian law enforcement officers in Bogota, Medellin, and Cali, Colombia. The New York Strike Force is comprised of representatives from the DEA, ICE, IRS, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, the United States Marshals Service, the New York City Police Department, and the New York State Police.

If convicted, LOPEZ-PENA faces a maximum sentence of life in prison and a mandatory minimum sentence of ten years in prison. The Indictment also seeks forfeiture of \$100 million from LOPEZ-PENA.

Mr. GARCIA praised the cooperative investigative efforts of the DEA, ICE, IRS, and the New York Strike Force, and also commended Colombian law enforcement officers for their partnership in the case.

The prosecution is being handled by the International Narcotics Trafficking Unit of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. MARC P. BERGER and KEVIN PUVALOWSKI are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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