



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

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**MANHATTAN U.S. ATTORNEY CHARGES FIFTEEN WITH OPERATING
MARIJUANA GROW HOUSES IN SULLIVAN COUNTY**

Over 6,000 Pounds Of Marijuana Worth \$20 Million Seized

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and JOHN P. GILBRIDE, the Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Field Division of the Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"), today announced the arrest of ELSA RODRIGUEZ, MAINOR GOODY-BERNAL, IVAN ENRIQUE BARRAZA-TORRES, JACQUELINE MIRELLA ROCA CRUZ, LUIS ESTUARDO, JOSE MARIO SOLAS AGUILAR, MARCO BARRAZA MORALES, EDGAR REYNALDO PORTILLO, WALTER ELYSEO SAMAYOA-BARRAZA, JAVIER PORTILLO-MAGAND, ANIBAL BENITEZ CARDOZO, RAMON LEON, AUGUSTINE SANCHEZ, RENE ANTONIO BARRAZA VASQUEZ and MARIA ELIZABETH SANTOS HERNANDEZ for operating marijuana grow houses in Sullivan County, New York. The defendants were presented in White Plains federal court before U.S. Magistrate Judge Paul E. Davison late this afternoon. All defendants were detained without bail.

U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA stated, "These alleged drug distributors thought they could hide in plain sight, using homes within our neighborhoods and communities to mask their virtual marijuana factories. But this suburban facade was exposed for what it really was, and these defendants will be prosecuted for their alleged crimes. As today's arrests demonstrate, this Office, the DEA and its Strike Force members are committed to stopping those who participate in the manufacture and distribution of drugs."

DEA Special Agent in Charge John P. Gilbride stated, "This takedown has weeded over 6,000 pounds of marijuana worth nearly twenty million dollars off the streets of not only New York, but cities throughout the Northeast. Hidden in houses located within the suburban communities of Sullivan County, these individuals were responsible for farming the most abused illicit drug in our nation - marijuana - while law enforcement took it out of arms reach of our communities. This seizure, the largest indoor marijuana grow operation of its kind in New York, exemplifies the sophistication with which these groups operate. Marijuana remains a significant source of illegal income for drug trafficking groups in the New York area. The arrests and seizure were successful due to the concerted efforts of the DEA led Strike Force and the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office."

According to a Complaint filed today in White Plains federal court and court proceedings also held today, on March 29, 2011, law enforcement officers searched a number of houses in the Mamakating area of Sullivan County that were operated by the defendants. Law enforcement agents seized over 6,300 marijuana plants and 30 pounds of marijuana during searches last night.

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If convicted, each defendant faces a mandatory minimum of 10 years in prison and a maximum of life imprisonment.

Mr. BHARARA praised the efforts of the DEA's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike force which is comprised of agents and officers of the DEA, New York City Police Department, Immigration and Customs Enforcement - Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the New York State Police, the United States Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, the United States Marshal Service and the United States Attorney's Office. The Strike Force is partially funded by the New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), which is a federally funded crime fighting initiative. He also thanked the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office for its role in the investigation.

This case is being handled by the White Plains Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office. Assistant U.S. Attorney JOHN P. COLLINS, JR. is 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.