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**FORMER DOMINICAN REPUBLIC CONSULAR EMPLOYEE SENTENCED
IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT TO 20 MONTHS IN PRISON
FOR SMUGGLING ALIENS INTO THE UNITED STATES**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and JAMES T. HAYES, JR., the Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE"), announced that FRANCISCO ESTEVEZ, a/k/a "Danilo," a former employee at the Consulate of the Dominican Republic in New York City, was sentenced today to 20 months in prison for alien smuggling. The sentence was imposed in Manhattan federal court by United States District Judge P. KEVIN CASTEL. ESTEVEZ pleaded guilty to a count of alien smuggling on July 20, 2009.

According to the Indictment, other documents filed in the case, and statements made during ESTEVEZ's guilty plea proceeding:

As a full-time employee at a consular post, ESTEVEZ, 49, held a diplomatic visa ("A-2 visa") which allowed him and his family members -- his mother, wife, and six children -- to enter and live in the United States. In addition, he and his family were entitled to receive expedited processing through passport control at airports in the United States.

From October 2007, through July 2008, ESTEVEZ took advantage of his A-2 visa status to smuggle into the United States at least 25 Dominican nationals who posed as members of ESTEVEZ's family, using the family's passports and A-2 visas.

ESTEVEZ made, on average, two trips per month to the Dominican Republic to identify aliens who could pose as members of his family, and charged each approximately \$10,000 for his assistance.

Mr. BHARARA praised the work of ICE in this case, and thanked Department of Justice Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs and the Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service for their contributions.

This case is being prosecuted by the Office's Organized Crime Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys ARIANNA R. BERG and JOHN T. ZACH are in charge of the prosecution.

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