



**UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE**  
*Southern District of New York*

U.S. ATTORNEY PREET BHARARA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Monday, October 17, 2011  
<http://www.justice.gov/usao/nys>

CONTACT: Ellen Davis, Carly Sullivan,  
Jerika Richardson  
(212) 637-2600

**ALLEGED SOUTH AMERICAN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKER**  
**EXTRADITED FROM COLOMBIA TO FACE COCAINE IMPORTATION**  
**CHARGES IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT**

*Joint Undercover Operation Between The DEA And The Government Of Liberia Led To Charges  
In June 2010 Against The Defendant And Eight Other Individuals*

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced the arrival of MARCEL ACEVEDO SARMIENTO, who was extradited from Colombia on charges that he conspired to import cocaine into the United States. ACEVEDO arrived Thursday, October 13, 2011 and was presented and arraigned on Friday, October 14, 2011, before U.S. District Judge JED S. RAKOFF. The charges against ACEVEDO arise out of a historic joint undercover operation, "Operation Relentless," between the United States Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA") and the Government of Liberia.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA stated: "As alleged, Marcel Acevedo Sarmiento was prepared to facilitate the importation of prodigious quantities of cocaine into Liberia so that he and his co-conspirators could resell it in countries around the world, including the United States, and reap millions of dollars in profits. Thanks to the tremendous efforts of the DEA and our international law enforcement partners, his alleged plans were thwarted and he will now face American justice. "

According to the Indictment, documents previously filed in Manhattan federal court, and other information in the public record:

During the last decade, drug trafficking organizations based in South America have increasingly used countries along, or near, the West African coast as trans-shipment hubs for importing massive quantities of cocaine to be later distributed in Europe or elsewhere within Africa. Through a combination of privately owned aircraft and maritime vessels, these organizations, predominantly based in Colombia and Venezuela, have transported hundreds of tons of cocaine, worth billions of dollars, to West African countries, including Liberia.

ACEVEDO is an alleged cocaine supplier based in Colombia and Venezuela, who was capable of transporting thousand-kilogram quantities of cocaine from South America to various locations in West Africa, for distribution within Africa and for further distribution to Europe and elsewhere. ACEVEDO worked in the international drug business with other members of the conspiracy charged in the Indictment, including in connection with a 4,000 kilogram shipment of

cocaine which was to be flown from Venezuela to Monrovia, Liberia, for a retail value of over \$100 million.

In a series of recorded telephone conversations with a confidential source working for the DEA ("the CS"), ACEVEDO, who claimed to have been involved in the cocaine trafficking business for over 20 years, coordinated efforts to arrange what was ultimately supposed to be a shipment of between 2,000 and 2,500 kilograms of cocaine on a plane from Venezuela to Liberia. ACEVEDO confirmed to the CS that the cocaine shipment had been protected by the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (the "FARC"), an international terrorist group dedicated to the violent overthrow of the democratically elected Government of Colombia.

On May 29, 2010, ACEVEDO indicated that Venezuelan authorities had seized his plane as well as the cocaine that it contained, and had directed him to leave the country. After apprising the CS of the seizure, ACEVEDO invited the CS to invest 500 kilograms in a new shipment out of Bolivia, which ACEVEDO understood the CS intended to import into New York. ACEVEDO instructed the CS to wire transfer a \$100,000 payment to him, and provided the CS with the relevant bank account information for the transfer.

\* \* \*

ACEVEDO is charged with one count of conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute cocaine, knowing and intending that the cocaine would be imported into the United States. This offense carries a mandatory minimum sentence of ten years in prison and a maximum term of life in prison.

ACEVEDO was charged along with CHIGBO PETER UMEH, KONSTANTIN YAROSHENKO, NATHANIAL FRENCH, KUDUFIA MAWUKO and JORGE IVAN SALAZAR CASTANO. UMEH and YAROSHENKO were convicted following a jury trial in April 2011 and sentenced to thirty years in prison and twenty years in prison, respectively. FRENCH and MAWUKO were acquitted after trial. CASTANO is incarcerated in Spain, awaiting extradition to the United States.

Mr. BHARARA praised the work of the Special Operations Division of the DEA, the DEA Lagos Country Office, the DEA Bogota Country Office, the U.S. Department of Justice Office of International Affairs, the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Embassy in Liberia, and the Republic of Liberia and its National Security Agency.

This prosecution is being handled by the Office's Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys JENNA M. DABBS, RANDALL JACKSON, CHRISTOPHER LAVIGNE, and MICHAEL M. ROSENSAFT 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.