



***United States Attorney
Southern District of New York***

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**LEADER OF NEW YORK CITY AREA COCAINE TRAFFICKING
ORGANIZATION SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS IN PRISON**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today that ROBERTO SANCHEZ - one of the leaders of an organization that imported and sold hundreds of kilograms of cocaine in New York City and New Jersey - was sentenced late yesterday to 20 years in prison. SANCHEZ pleaded guilty on March 9, 2009, to narcotics conspiracy before United States District Judge RICHARD SULLIVAN, who also imposed yesterday's sentence. Several other members of SANCHEZ's criminal organization, including SANCHEZ's wife, GABRIELLE COHEN-SANCHEZ, pled guilty earlier this year to narcotics conspiracy charges. Two of SANCHEZ's subordinates, MILTON SAMUELS and LENROY MCLEAN, were convicted after a jury trial of narcotics and firearms charges on March 31, 2009.

The proof at SANCHEZ's sentencing hearing and at the trial showed that, in 2007 and 2008, SANCHEZ and his wife, GABRIELLE COHEN-SANCHEZ, partnered with other conspirators to import hundreds of kilograms of cocaine in container ships from Panama. SANCHEZ and COHEN-SANCHEZ operated a partially legitimate trucking company known as Transfreight Logistics, which had significant access to local seaports. Because of this access, SANCHEZ was able to surreptitiously remove shipping containers from the ports that had been loaded with large amounts of cocaine by the conspiracy's suppliers in Panama. The cocaine was then distributed to lower level narcotics dealers throughout the area. The proof at the hearing and trial established that SANCHEZ's organization sold millions of dollars worth of cocaine during the course of the conspiracy.

SANCHEZ's arrest and prosecution stemmed from a long-term investigation orchestrated by the HIDTA II Task Force of the

New Jersey Division of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"). The HIDTA II Task Force is comprised of agents and officers of the DEA, the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE"), and area Sheriff's departments. During the investigation, which involved wiretaps, extensive surveillance, and undercover operations, the DEA was able to seize approximately 300 kilograms of the organization's cocaine, with an estimated wholesale value of over \$6 million. The DEA also seized several firearms, including an AK-47 assault rifle, from members of the organization.

In addition to the prison term, Judge SULLIVAN ordered SANCHEZ to pay a \$1 million fine.

In sentencing the defendant, Judge SULLIVAN observed that SANCHEZ's activities constituted "staggeringly bad conduct, with ramifications for this entire community."

MR. BHARARA praised the outstanding efforts of the HIDTA II Task Force; the DEA; the Internal Revenue Service; ICE; and all other cooperating law enforcement agencies.

Assistant United States Attorneys RANDALL W. JACKSON, CHI T. STEVE KWOK, and JASON B. SMITH are in charge of the prosecution.