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MEMBER OF TRANSNATIONAL HEROIN-TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION
THAT INCLUDED CORRUPT COLOMBIAN NATIONAL POLICE OFFICERS
PLEADS GUILTY IN MANHATTAN FEDERAL COURT

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 Office of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"), announced that GERMAN SOTO-VILLA, the last of seven defendants extradited from Colombia to face charges of conspiring to smuggle multi-kilogram shipments of heroin aboard commercial flights to New York City, pleaded guilty today in Manhattan federal court before United States Magistrate Judge KEVIN NATHANIEL FOX.

According to the Superseding Indictment and other court documents:

Beginning in August 2006, defendant HUMBEIRO CARVAJAL-MONTOYA led a transnational criminal organization that smuggled heroin into the United States from Colombia. The organization included, among others, a network of corrupt law enforcement officials and airport and airline personnel who facilitated the export of heroin through Jose Maria Cordoba International Airport in Medellin, Colombia ("Medillin Airport"), to New York City. Couriers for the organization smuggled heroin into the United States inside layers of clothing, within the linings of suitcases and handbags, beneath false bottoms of suitcases, and inside computers. The organization's couriers regularly traveled from the Medellin area to New York City, carrying between several hundred grams to several kilograms of heroin at a time.

SOTO-VILLA, who was the security supervisor of the Duty Free Zone near the Medellin Airport, was extradited from Colombia to the Southern District of New York in November 2008. SOTO-VILLA's co-conspirators in the heroin-importation operation included: CARVAJAL-MONTOYA and his wife and partner, DIANA LOPEZ; Colombian National Police officers MANUEL JULIAN LOPEZ-NAIZZIR, a/k/a "El Costeño," a/k/a "El Costeñito," JULIAN DARIO HENAO-VERGARA, and HENRY ALBERTO TOBON-CADAVID, each of whom was assigned to the Medellin Airport Police Unit; ELKIN FERNANDO DAZA-RIOS, a commercial airline employee who worked in the international cargo facility; and courier NATALIE RIOS-CANO.

Colombian authorities, pursuant to a request for provisional arrests from the United States, arrested CARVAJAL-MONTOYA, LOPEZ, LOPEZ-NAIZZIR, SOTO-VILLA, and DAZA-RIOS in Colombia on November 28, 2007. HENAO-VERGARA and RIOS-CANO were arrested earlier. With the exception of TOBON-CAVIDAD, whom the United States did not seek to extradite, each of these defendants was successfully extradited to the Southern District of New York between August and November 2008. As part of the extradition request, the United States provided assurances to the Government of Colombia that it would not seek a life sentence for the defendants, but instead would ask for a term of years.

SOTO-VILLA pleaded guilty today to one count of conspiring to import heroin into the United States. All seven defendants extradited from Colombia, including SOTO-VILLA, have now pleaded guilty to heroin-importation charges. DIANA LOPEZ has been sentenced to time served and 3 years of supervised release. The remaining defendants, including SOTO-VILLA, are scheduled to be sentenced on a later date.

The investigation was led by the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force ("Task Force") consisting of agents and officers of the DEA, the New York City Police Department, and the New York State Police. DEA's Bogota Country Office assisted with this investigation. Mr. BHARARA praised the Task Force and its members, as well as DEA's Bogota Country Office, for their work in this case.

"Transnational criminal groups that join forces with corrupt law enforcement officers pose a grave threat to global security," said United States Attorney PREET BHARARA. "Working with our foreign partners, this Office will continue to target leaders of drug cartels and their henchmen, including any corrupt cops who betray their badges to help them."

"Throughout this investigation, law enforcement united in order to identify and dismantle a drug trafficking

organization smuggling significant quantities of heroin into the United States," said DEA Special Agent-in-Charge JOHN P. GILBRIDE. "Hiding behind the shields that they wore, they betrayed the public's trust to keep international airports secure. This guilty plea represents the end of this particular drug trafficking organization and the success of international law enforcement cooperation."

The prosecution is being handled by the Office's International Narcotics Trafficking Unit. Assistant United States Attorneys ANJAN SAHNI and SARAH LAI are in charge of the prosecution.

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