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THREE MS-13 MEMBERS SENTENCED FOR ROLE IN RICO CONSPIRACY

WASHINGTON – Three members of La Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, have been sentenced in Nashville, Tenn., for their participation in a racketeering enterprise, Acting Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division Matthew Friedrich and U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee Edward M. Yarbrough announced today.

Ernesto Isai Mendez-Tovar, a/k/a “Joker,” Eliseo Iglesias, a/k/a “Smokey,” and David Alexander Gonzalez, a/k/a “Psycho,” were sentenced by Chief U.S. District Judge Todd J. Campbell of the Middle District of Tennessee. On Oct. 3, 2008, Mendez-Tovar was sentenced to 13 years in prison and five years of supervised release; on Oct. 6, 2008, Iglesias was sentenced to 210 months in prison and three years of supervised release; and today Gonzalez was sentenced to 235 months in prison and five years of supervised release.

Mendez-Tovar pleaded guilty to a RICO charge, which alleged that he and others involved in the MS-13 gang conspired to participate in a pattern of racketeering activity in the Nashville metropolitan area, including murder, attempted murder and witness tampering. In addition, the indictment stated that on Jan. 20, 2006, Mendez-Tovar and another MS-13 member shot and killed an individual who disrespected the MS-13 gang.

The RICO charge to which Iglesias and Gonzalez pleaded guilty charged that each defendant, along with others, were involved in the MS-13 gang which conspired to participate in a pattern of racketeering activity in the Nashville metropolitan area, including murder, attempted murder and witness tampering. In addition, the indictment stated that on April 12, 2006, Iglesias, Gonzalez and other MS-13 gang members fired handguns at a rival gang member and his girlfriend. The rival gang member was struck several times and sustained permanent physical injuries. The indictment further stated that on May 21, 2006, Iglesias, Gonzalez and other MS-13 gang members fired a handgun at an individual who was suspected of being a member of the rival street gang Brown Pride. The victim was struck and wounded in the arm.

Including Mendez-Tovar, Iglesias and Gonzalez, 10 defendants have now been sentenced on RICO charges stemming from an indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Nashville on Jan. 10, 2007. That indictment charged 14 members of MS-13 with conspiring to participate in the affairs of a racketeering enterprise and related charges including murder, attempted murder, assault, weapons charges and obstruction of justice.

Seven other defendants were previously sentenced to prison after pleading guilty to the RICO conspiracy. Walter Hernandez was sentenced on March 31, 2008, to 324 months in prison. On Dec. 3 and Dec. 7, 2007, respectively, Henry Garballo-Vasquez and Jose Alfaro were sentenced to 240 months in prison. On Nov. 20, 2007, Geovanni Pena received a sentence of 235 months in prison. On Sept. 8, 2008, Ericka Cortez received a sentence of 46 months in prison. On Sept. 16, 2008, Escolastico Serrano received a sentence of 45 years in prison. On Sept. 25, 2008, Ronald Fuentes received a sentence of life in prison.

According to the indictment, the MS-13 gang is a violent international criminal organization composed primarily of immigrants or descendants of immigrants from El Salvador. The purpose of the racketeering enterprise was to preserve and protect the power, territory and profits of the MS-13 enterprise through violent assault, murder, threats of violence and intimidation.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jimmie Lynn Ramsaur of the Middle District of Tennessee and Trial Attorney John Han from the Criminal Division's Gang Squad.

The case was investigated by the Criminal Division's Gang Squad; the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Middle District of Tennessee; the Nashville Metropolitan Police Department's Gang Suppression Unit; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement; and the Davidson County District Attorney General's Office.

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