



*United States Attorney
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**FORMER FEDERAL IMMIGRATION OFFICER PLEADS GUILTY
TO COCAINE TRAFFICKING CONSPIRACY**

NEWARK, N.J. – A former federal Immigration Enforcement Agent pleaded guilty today to conspiring to steal a large quantity of cocaine from a purported drug dealer with the intent to distribute it, United States Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Valentino Johnson, 26, of Brooklyn, New York – who at the time of the offense was an agent with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Detention and Removal Operations in Manhattan – pleaded guilty to an Indictment charging him with conspiracy to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute cocaine.

The hearing was held before United States District Judge William J. Martini. Johnson was permitted to continue on bail pending his sentencing, which is scheduled for October 13, 2010.

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in Newark federal court:

Johnson admitted to entering into a conspiracy with Ernie Doyle and Kareem Middleton, who are also charged in the Indictment, and another individual who was an ICE confidential informant (the Informant), to steal what he believed to be a large quantity of cocaine from a Newark, New Jersey warehouse. Johnson admitted that, once he obtained the cocaine, he planned to sell or cause the drugs to be sold and the profits divided among the co-conspirators.

Johnson and his co-conspirators traveled to Newark on September 10, 2009, the day before the planned burglary, to inspect the warehouse, and returned on September 11, 2009, to steal the cocaine. Once they arrived at the warehouse, Middleton used bolt cutters to cut a lock on the gate leading to the premises and then to cut a lock on the door leading into the warehouse. Johnson and Middleton then entered the warehouse and unloaded what they believed to be kilograms of cocaine from a truck parked inside, while Doyle stood watch nearby.

Johnson, Middleton, and Doyle were arrested as part of an undercover investigation by Special Agents of ICE's Office of Investigations in Newark. The Informant met with Doyle and Johnson in August, at which time an impending cocaine shipment to Newark of between 40 and 60 kilograms was discussed. At a subsequent meeting on Sept. 7, it was discussed that Johnson and Middleton could sell 10 kilos of cocaine a week and that kilograms of cocaine sold for between \$26,000 and \$30,000.

The charge to which Johnson pleaded guilty carries a maximum statutory penalty of life in prison, a statutory mandatory minimum of 10 years in prison, and a fine of up to \$4 million. In determining an actual sentence, Judge Martini will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors, including acceptance of responsibility. The judge has discretion and is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

The charges against Middleton and Doyle are pending.

Fishman credited ICE Special Agents, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Peter T. Edge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Newark, for the investigation leading to the arrests and Indictment, and the New Jersey State Police, under the direction of Col. Rick Fuentes, Superintendent, for its tactical support during the arrests in this matter. Fishman also thanked for their assistance Terence Opiola, Special Agent in Charge, Northeast, of the Department Homeland Security Office of Professional Responsibility and Gregory Knull, Special Agent in Charge of the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General in Marlton, N.J.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Eric W. Moran of the United States Attorney's Office Special Prosecutions Division in Newark.

As for Middleton and Doyle, the charges and allegations contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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Defense counsel: Jeff Chabrowe, Esq., New York, NY