

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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## ***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA***

***San Diego, California  
United States Attorney  
Laura E. Duffy***

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***For Immediate Release***

### **LIEUTENANT OF MAJOR MEXICAN DRUG CARTEL SENTENCED**

#### **NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – August 9, 2013**

Mario Escamilla, a high-ranking lieutenant of the Fernando Sanchez-Arellano drug trafficking organization, was sentenced today to 35 years in prison for his role as leader of the cartel's U.S. operations, which included kidnappings and murders.

Escamilla is the 39th of 43 defendants charged in the case in July of 2010 to plead guilty. The original complaint charged that defendants participated in a federal racketeering (RICO) conspiracy involving murder, kidnaping, robbery, drug trafficking and money laundering offenses. As set forth in the complaint, the defendants are members and associates of the Fernando Sanchez Organization (FSO), an offshoot of the Arellano-Felix cartel.

Escamilla pleaded guilty in January of 2012 to the RICO conspiracy and narcotics distribution conspiracy charges. In his plea agreement, he admitted to involvement in three murder conspiracies – all of which were prevented by law enforcement.

In the sentencing memorandum, Assistant U.S. Attorney Todd Robinson wrote that Escamilla targeted people for assassination for frivolous reasons – like stealing a relatively small quantity of marijuana, or for “disrespecting” the cartel leadership.

“Escamilla confirmed through his conduct in this case that he has no qualms about committing murder, no matter how trivial the justification is for doing so,” prosecutors wrote. Because of court-authorized electronic surveillance in this case and the diligence of the law enforcement officers handling this investigation, defendant Escamilla failed in his attempts at killing the above-noted individuals.

In handing down the sentence, U.S. District Judge William Q. Hayes noted that “the conduct of Mr. Escamilla can only be described as aggravated . . . he conspired to murder three people in cold blood and he participated in the trafficking of a significant amount of methamphetamine, one of the most addictive and destructive controlled substances our society must deal with.”

Of the remaining four defendants, two are fugitives, one is believed to be dead, and the lead defendant in the case, Armando Villareal-Heredia, was extradited to the United States on May 23, 2012; his trial is scheduled to begin on October 22, 2013.

Also charged in this case was Jesus Quiñones Marques, the Director of International Liaison for the Baja California Attorney General’s Office. According to court documents, Quinones was aware of the FSO’s illegal activities and used his position to obtain confidential law enforcement information for the use of the FSO. According to his plea agreement, he was involved in making arrangements to have various rivals of the FSO arrested and detained by Mexican law enforcement officials. He was sentenced to 97 months in prison in September of 2012.

This case was the result of a long-term investigation conducted by the multi-agency San Diego Cross Border Violence Task Force (CBVTF). The CBVTF was formulated to target those individuals involved in organized crime-related violent activities affecting both the United States and Mexico. Law enforcement personnel assigned to the CBVTF made extensive use of court-authorized wiretaps and other sophisticated investigative techniques to develop the significant evidence which led to the charges in this case.

United States Attorney Duffy praised the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) for the coordinated team effort in the culmination of this investigation, “Operation Luz Verde.”

Agents and officers from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, San Diego Police Department, Drug Enforcement Administration, San Diego Sheriff’s Office, Chula Vista Police Department, U.S. Marshals Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, San Diego District Attorney’s Office, and California Department of Justice participated in this OCDETF investigation. The OCDETF program was created to consolidate and utilize all law enforcement resources in this country’s battle against organized crime and major drug trafficking organizations.

**DEFENDANT**

**Case Number** 10CR3044-WQH

Mario Escamilla

## **SUMMARY OF CHARGES**

Title 18, United States Code, Section 1962(d) - Conspiracy to Conduct Enterprise Affairs  
Through a Pattern of Racketeering Activity (RICO conspiracy)  
Maximum penalties: Life in prison, \$250,000 fine

Title 21, United States Code, Sections 846 and 841(a)(1) - Conspiracy to Distribute Controlled  
Substances  
Maximum penalties: Life in prison, \$10,000,000 fine

## **INVESTIGATING AGENCIES**

Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Chula Vista Police Department  
San Diego Police Department  
Drug Enforcement Administration  
San Diego Sheriff's Office  
U.S. Marshals Service  
Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms  
California Department of Justice

