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MARKSVILLE MAN SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

Defendant caught taking pictures of teenaged girls in local park

ALEXANDRIA, La.: BEN DARANDA, age 50, of Marksville, Louisiana, will spend the rest of his life in prison for sexual exploitation of children, United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced. DARANDA was sentenced today by United States District Judge Dee D. Drell in Alexandria.

DARANDA was found guilty of sexual exploitation of children after a two day trial in August 2008. The incident occurred in Alexandria, Louisiana, at a public park on August 4, 2006. At approximately 12:30 a.m., an Alexandria Police Officer received a complaint that a couple was having sex in the park. When the officer approached the area, he saw a series of flashes. As the officer got closer, he saw the defendant taking photographs with a digital camera of two partially nude teenage girls posing in a sexually suggestive manner. The two girls subsequently gave a statement to the police that they had known DARANDA for a couple of weeks and that they had told him they were both 15 years old.

The defendant, a registered sex offender, has a Louisiana state 2001 felony conviction for child molestation and a 2006 felony conviction for contributing to the delinquency of a minor. DARANDA received the mandatory life sentence due to his prior convictions.

United States Attorney Washington stated: "This office is completely dedicated to using the full force of federal law to bring to justice those who sexually exploit our children. Daranda fully deserves to spend the rest of his life in federal prison. The blunt force of child exploitation must be met by vigorous investigations and prosecutions seeking maximum punishment."

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood. In February 2006, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. Led by the United States Attorneys Offices, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit: www.projectsafchildhood.gov.

This case was investigated by Detective Chad Gremillion of the Louisiana State Police and was prosecuted by Assistant U. S. Attorney Earl M. Campbell.

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