

Department of Justice

United States Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr.
Western District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MAY 25, 2012
www.usdoj.gov/usao/nyw

CONTACT: BARBARA BURNS
PHONE: (716) 843-5817
FAX: (716) 551-3051

17 MEMBERS, ASSOCIATES OF CHEKO'S CREW/7TH STREET GANG INDICTED FOR RACKETEERING, NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING AND MURDER

BUFFALO, N.Y.-- U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that a federal grand jury in Buffalo has returned a 36-count Superseding Indictment charging 11 additional members of Cheko's Crew/7th Street Gang with Racketeering Influenced Corrupt Organizations (RICO), RICO conspiracy, violent crimes in aid of racketeering, narcotics trafficking, firearms offenses and robbery. The Superseding Indictment also accuses six original defendants of additional charges.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph M. Tripi, who is handling the case, stated that the Indictment alleges specific acts of violence including six attempted murders, two murders, and one robbery. The defendants and their associates distributed heroin, cocaine and marijuana, planned, conspired and committed shootings and murders against rival gang members and routinely possessed and carried firearms.

In May 2011, a grand jury charged six gang members including Efrain Hidalgo, Kasiem Williams, Esteban Ramos-Cruz, Juan Torres, Thomas Rodriguez and Jordan Hildago, with violent crimes in aid of racketeering and other charges. In addition to the original defendants, the Superseding Indictment charges Sammy Ortiz, Jason Dryzmala, Joseph Whitely, Uda Hidalgo, Ritchie Juarbe, Brittany Ground, Cecilio Medina, Carmen Geter, Alejandro Navarro Gonzalez, Luis Medina, Leslie Cunningham, and David Tirado.

The Indictment charges Efrain Hidalgo, Kasiem Williams, Esteban Ramos-Cruz, Juan Torres, Jordan Hidalgo, Uda Hildago, and Ritchie Juarbe with participating in the murder of Eric Morrow on August 11, 2009. Efrain Hildago is also charged with participating in the June 5, 2010 murder of Virgil Page. In addition, the Indictment alleges:

- Defendants Efrain Hidalgo, Kasiem Williams, and Ritchie Juarbe attempted to murder rival 10th Street Gang member Edwin Rivera on July 10 2009;
- Defendants Efrain Hidalgo and Kasiem Williams attempted to murder rival 10th Street Gang member Edwin Rivera on August 29 2009;
- Defendants Efrain Hidalgo and Kasiem Williams attempted to murder rival 10th Street Gang member Saul Santana on September 24, 2009;
- Defendants Efrain Hidalgo and Kasiem Williams attempted to murder a victim identified as W.M. on November 5, 2009;
- Defendants Efrain Hidalgo, Kasiem Williams, and Brittany Ground attempted to murder rival gang member B.C. on May 24, 2010 but shot instead a victim identified as M.B.;
- Defendants Efrain Hidalgo and Leslie Cunningham attempted to murder rival 10th Street Gang members Desmond Ford and D.M. on June 13, 2010.

According to the Indictment, Cheko's Crew and the 7th Street Gang formed an alliance in the early 2000's based on friend and familial association, close physical proximity to 7th Street and their shared rivalry with the 10th Street gang. The defendants and their associates worked together distributing illegal narcotics and defended drug territory on Buffalo's West Side against rival gangs and drug dealers including the rival 10th Street gang.

During today's roundup, law enforcement officers seized a gun and a quantity of heroin.

"For far too long, members of Cheko's Crew and the 7th Street Gang held residents on the West side of Buffalo prisoner by filling the streets with illegal narcotics, guns and violence," said U.S. Attorney Hochul. "A year ago our Office, along with our law enforcement partners began targeting these gangs and today, 17 members of this gang will now know what it feels like to be held prisoner. The days of Cheko's Crew and the 7th Street Gang committing shootings, murders and drug deals in the city of Buffalo are over. But, while this gang has essentially been dismantled, our work is not done. This case should serve as a warning that our focus on gangs will continue and those involved in similar activity will be exposed to the same fate that has befallen these defendants."

"The FBI worked collectively with the Buffalo Police Department and the New York State Police to investigate this violent street gang," said FBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge Steven L. Lanser. "The 7th Street Gang is suspected of committing multiple violent crimes, over an extended period of time, in our community. The more violent criminal networks that we target together, the more likely the violent crime will decrease in Buffalo. We highly encourage the community to report information concerning homicides and shootings to law enforcement in order to help us resolve the cases quickly and prevent further crimes from being committed by the same individuals."

The Indictment is the culmination of an investigation on the part of Special Agents

of the FBI under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Christopher M. Piehota, New York State Police under the direction of Major Christopher Cummings, the Buffalo Police Department under the direction of Commissioner Daniel Derenda and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives under the direction of Frank Christiano.

The fact that a defendant has been charged with a crime is merely an accusation and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

#