

United States Department of Justice

For Immediate Release

July 23, 2010 **United States Attorney's Office**
Southern District of California

Forty-Three Defendants with Ties to a Drug Cartel in Mexico Charged with Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) Conspiracy

Individuals Allegedly Responsible for State and Federal Crimes, Including Murder, Kidnapping, Firearms, and Drug Trafficking Violations

SAN DIEGO, CA—A criminal complaint was unsealed today charging 43 defendants with participating in a federal racketeering (RICO) conspiracy. The RICO conspiracy alleged in the complaint involves the commission of both state and federal crimes, including murder, conspiracy to commit murder, kidnapping, conspiracy to commit kidnapping, robbery, conspiracy to commit 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 drug-trafficking cartel.

The complaint also alleges that Jesus Quiñones Marques, the Director of International Liaison for the Baja California Attorney General's Office, 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 the complaint, he was involved in making arrangements to have various rivals of the FSO arrested and detained by Mexican law enforcement officials.

The charges stem from a long-term investigation, entitled "Operation Luz Verde" (green light), conducted by the multi-agency San Diego Cross Border Violence Task Force (CBVTF), which 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 body of evidence that led to the charges in this case.

"The presence of foreign-based drug-trafficking organization members and associates in San Diego will not be tolerated. The San Diego law enforcement community leverages every asset to ensure that this fine city never becomes the safe haven from which drug-trafficking organizations stage their operations as drug wars and law enforcement scrutiny disrupt narco-business. These traffickers will simply not be allowed to walk our streets and live among our neighborhoods, and we will certainly not tolerate the seepage of drug-related violence in our communities. We are committed to disrupting their operations and will concentrate our efforts to stop them from committing their day-to-day criminal activities here," said United States Attorney Laura E. Duffy.

FBI Special Agent in Charge Keith Slotter commented, "Today's arrests are the result of a long term multi-agency investigation. Dedicated personnel from agencies at all levels of government worked in unison to combat this dangerous and violent criminal enterprise. Today we are

rewarded with dozens of arrests that truly have an impact on safety and well-being within our local communities.”

“The arrests made at the conclusion of this investigation illustrate the commitment of DEA and our law enforcement partners to dismantling these drug trafficking organizations at every level,” said DEA San Diego Special Agent in Charge Ralph W. Partridge. “The citizens of San Diego can feel safer today knowing that these violent offenders are off of our streets.”

“The San Diego Police Department is proud to have participated in such a successful operation. The message that San Diego law enforcement is sending to organized crime is clear: cross border violence and cartel activities will NOT be tolerated in the City of San Diego,” said San Diego Police Chief William Lansdowne. “Any portion of a criminal enterprise that is planned, coordinated, or conducted in San Diego will be investigated and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, maintaining San Diego as one of America’s safest cities for our citizens and visitors. Cartels should make no mistake: our business is to end their business.”

“ATF has participated in disrupting a violent criminal organization that was supplying the tools for Mexican cartels to kill law enforcement and innocent citizens,” said Special Agent in Charge John A. Torres of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). “ATF’s mission is to prevent violent crime in this country and prevent illegal firearms from crossing into Mexico.”

United States Attorney Duffy praised the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) for the coordinated team effort in the culmination of this investigation. Agents and officers from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, San Diego Police Department, Drug Enforcement Administration, San Diego County Sheriff’s Office, Chula Vista Police Department, U.S. Marshals Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, California Department of Justice and the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office 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.

The case is being prosecuted in San Diego federal court by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Todd W. Robinson and James P. Melendres.