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TWENTY INDIVIDUALS INDICTED FOR PARTICIPATION IN DRUG TRAFFICKING CONSPIRACY USING THE U. S. MAIL AND OTHER POSTAL VIOLATIONS

Forfeiture allegations for approximately eight million dollars

SAN JUAN, P.R. - A federal grand jury indicted twenty (20) individuals, in four different indictments, as a result of an investigation lead by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and USPS-Office of Inspector General (USPS-OIG), announced today United States Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico, Rosa Emilia Rodríguez Vélez. Seven of the indicted individuals are mail carriers for the US Postal Service.

The defendants in the first indictment are charged with thirty-four counts, including conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute heroin, cocaine and marijuana, and using firearms during and in relation to a drug trafficking crime. Defendant Olly Nieves Burgos, a U.S. Postal mail carrier, was the leader of the conspiracy. From in or about 2003, Nieves Burgos, Ramiro Escobar Llanch, Edwin Rivera Medero and José Rivera Franco abused their positions as mail carriers for the U.S. Postal Service to facilitate drug shipments between Puerto Rico, Texas, California and Arizona. They were all assigned as mail carriers at the 65th Infantry U.S. Post Office in San Juan.

The indictment alleges that, as part of the manner and means of the conspiracy, defendants would inform clients of successful methods to send narcotics through the U.S. Postal Service and avoid detection from law enforcement. Defendants would meet with their co-conspirators at pre-determined locations during work hours to receive their parcels while wearing their U.S. Postal uniforms, in order to make these transactions appear less suspicious.

The indictment further alleges that the defendants would take the parcels to the post office and place them into the mail system. The defendants would then obtain confirmation numbers for their clients in order for them to track the location of the packages. At the conclusion of the transactions, the defendants would provide receipts and parcel confirmation numbers to their

clients, as proof that the packages had been mailed. The defendants received payments for mailing the drugs. The amount of the payments varied based on the weight of the parcel, the amount of narcotics inside and the type of narcotics being mailed.

It is also alleged that defendants discovered other narcotic traffickers who were using the mail system on their routes to send or receive narcotics. The defendants warned these traffickers that they had to pay a fee to conduct this activity on their routes. If the traffickers did not pay the defendant mail carriers this fee, the defendants would steal the narcotics.

The second indictment charges Edgardo López Arroyo and Sergio Cruz Vega with conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine. Sergio Cruz Vega is a mail carrier who accepted payment for the shipment of narcotics arranged by López Arroyo. The third indictment charges José Rivera Franco, who is one of the leaders and advisors of the largest conspiracy charged in the first indictment, with theft of mail matter by officer or employee, and unlawful possession of a controlled substance.

The fourth indictment includes twenty-seven counts against Olly Nieves Burgos and Ramiro Escobar Llanch, the two leaders of the largest conspiracy previously mentioned in the first indictment, Jeffrey Villalobos, Pedro Rivera and Eliseo Castro. These five defendants are charged with conspiracy to have Eliseo Castro falsely assume and pretend to be a mail carrier by dressing as a U.S. Postal Service employee and delivering the mail while the other four defendants received pay and benefits from the U.S. Postal Service without performing their assigned duties.

"Today's indictments exemplify the department's commitment to aggressively prosecute any corrupt officer who violates the law," said United States Attorney Rosa Emilia Rodríguez Vélez. "The conduct of these defendants demonstrates a reprehensible abuse of their power and a violation of their position of trust as U.S. Postal mail carriers."

"Drug trafficking corrupts those public officials who are lured by the easy money," said Javier F. Pena, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA Caribbean Division "It's sad to see that these government employees chose the wrong side of the law, nevertheless, DEA will firmly pursue those public officials engaged in drug trafficking to safeguard the integrity of our government institutions "

"Public corruption, particularly among federal and postal employees, cannot and will not be tolerated. The Office of Inspector General, together with the DEA and our other federal, state, and local partners, will continue to aggressively pursue these matters," stated Special Agent in Charge Jane Hughes of the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General.

Deputy Chief Postal Inspector, Shawn Tiller stated: "The US Postal Inspection Service is committed to ensuring the safety of USPS employees and our customers and to enforce the laws that defend the nation's Mail system from illegal and dangerous use, including drug traffickers who choose to utilize the mail system to ship illegal weapons and drugs as was the case here today".

"This OCDETF investigation is just another example of collaboration and partnerships between ATF, our Federal law enforcement brethren, and the Police of Puerto Rico in the never ending battle to stop the flow of guns and drugs into our communities, said Hugo Barrera, Special Agent In Charge of ATF. These individuals betrayed the public's trust and used their positions in the US Postal Service to pollute our community with guns and drugs. We are proud to be members of this investigation to thwart this egregious criminal conduct."

This investigation was conducted under the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force. The following agencies provided significant assistance to this investigation: United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the Puerto Rico Police Department (PRPD), San Juan Municipal Police Department and Puerto Rico Ports Authority Police.

These cases are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Sean Torriente. If convicted, the fifteen defendants charged in the largest conspiracy could face up to life in prison. Defendants Edgardo López Arroyo and Sergio Cruz Vega face up to forty (40) years in prison. Defendants Jeffrey Villalobos, Pedro Rivera and Eliseo Castro, charged with violations to the Postal Services statute, face up to three years in prison.

An indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed to be innocent until and unless proven guilty. The investigation continues.

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