



McGregor W. Scott

United States Attorney
Eastern District of California

Sacramento
501 I. Street, Ste 10-100
Sacramento CA 95814
Tel (916) 554-2700
TTY (916) 554-2855

NEWS RELEASE

Fresno
2500 Tulare St., Suite 4401
Fresno, CA 93721
Tel (559) 497-4000
TTY (559) 497-4500

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Contact:

Sacramento - Jason Hitt, 916-554-2700

Fresno - Karen Escobar, 559-497-4000

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MASSIVE CENTRAL VALLEY AND BAY AREA NUESTRA FAMILIA GROUP DISMANTLED

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that a federal grand jury returned an indictment in Sacramento against MARIO DIAZ, Jr., 34, of Los Banos; LARRY SIXTO AMARO, 40 of Hanford; GERARDO LOPEZ MORA, 30, of Salinas; ERNEST PAUL KILLINGER, 30, of Orangevale; FERNANDO VILLALPANDO, 38, of Moreno Valley; JASON MICHAEL STEWART HANSON, 33, of Los Banos; ALVARO COBIAN GOMEZ, 37, of Los Banos; BISMARCK MARTIN OCAMPO, 37, of Petaluma; BENJAMIN SANTOS CASTRO, 31, of San Francisco; MARCOS ANTHONY GOMEZ, Jr., 28, of San Francisco; EDWARD FUENTES, 27, of Merced; RICHARD MENDOZA, 23, of Castroville; ERNESTO BRAVO TEJEDA, 37, of Madera; LEO TORRES, 34, of Dos Palos; DAVID PEREZ RAMIREZ, 27, of Manteca; FAUSTINO GONZALES, 29 of Salinas; OSCAR CAMPOS PADILLA, 26, of Castroville; JOSE ANGEL VILLASENOR, 33, of Fremont; MANUEL GAUNA, 39, of Salinas; THURMAN LEE MAXWELL, 37, of Warren, Ohio; ANDREA CADENA, 29, of Los Banos; MANUEL SOMORA CADENA, 56, of Salinas; PEDRO ANTHONY RIOS, III, 47, of Salinas; SOPHIA CORELLA SANCHEZ, 28, of Marina; VALDEMAR SALAZAR CAMBUNGA, 49, of Los Banos; and GABRIEL CARACHEO, 34, of Salinas; charging them with conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana, and ecstasy, two counts of distribution of methamphetamine, one count of possession with intent to distribute cocaine, and one count of possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine.

A related indictment was returned on June 7, 2007, by a federal grand jury sitting in Fresno charging FIDEL RAMON CASTRO, aka "Mouse," aka "Mousey," 33; VINCENT RIVERA, 43; CRYSTAL CASTRO, 22; JULIA QUIROZ, 38; WILLIAM EUGENE CONNELLY, 50; all of Bakersfield, California, and JUAN VILLALOBOS ARIAS, 51; ALEJANDRA ARIAS, 20; and MARIA VICTORIA MARQUEZ PULIDO, 40; all of Fontana, California, with one count of conspiracy to distribute and to possess with the intent to distribute methamphetamine, cocaine, and marijuana, seven counts of distribution of methamphetamine, two counts of distribution of cocaine, one count of possession with intent to distribute cocaine, and one count of possession with intent to distribute marijuana.

The two indictments are the product of an intensive investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Stockton Violent Crime Task Force, the San Joaquin County Metropolitan Narcotics Task Force (METRO), the Stockton Police Department, and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in Bakersfield into the activities of two separate drug trafficking organizations which aligned together to distribute methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana, and ecstasy. The FBI investigation dubbed "Operation Valley Star," focused on the Mario DIAZ Drug Trafficking Organization (DIAZ DTO), which was responsible for distributing large amounts of illegal narcotics, including methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana, and ecstasy throughout the Eastern and Northern Districts of California, with supply lines from Mexico and distribution channels reaching to other United States cities, including Warren, Ohio, and Atlanta, Georgia. The DIAZ DTO operates under the umbrella of the NUESTRA FAMILIA (NF), a violent Hispanic prison gang based within the California prison system whose members exert control over street-level Norteño gang members engaged in drug trafficking and violent crime. DIAZ operated an urban clothing store in Los Banos, California, called Geez Clothing.

The DEA investigation dubbed "Operation Dictator," focused on the activities of Fidel Ramon CASTRO, a convicted drug trafficker, who also operated an urban clothing store called Geez Clothing in Bakersfield. According to the court record, CASTRO and his associates obtained cocaine smuggled into Southern California from Mexico and then sold it to drug trafficking organizations, including the DIAZ DTO. In addition, it is alleged that CASTRO was also involved in the distribution of methamphetamine, marijuana, and ecstasy. The DEA was assisted in its investigation by agents and officers of the Riverside DEA, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), Bakersfield Police Department, Kern County Sheriff's Department, Southern Tri-County High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), and Rialto Police Department.

According to United States Attorney Scott, as a result of the collaborative law enforcement effort, agents arrested a total of 39 individuals and executed 28 federal search warrants in the Central Valley, San Francisco, and Monterey Bay Areas, and Southern California, and have seized:

FBI Seizures from Operation Valley Star

- 148 pounds of methamphetamine
- 17 kilograms of cocaine
- 60 marijuana plants in an indoor grow operation discovered in Stockton
- 13 firearms
- approximately \$81,000 in cash
- 2006 Chrysler 300M with an estimated value of \$19,000
- 2006 745 BMW with an estimated value of \$30,000

DEA Seizures from Operation Dictator

- 15 kilograms of cocaine
- 247.7 grams of methamphetamine
- 188 marijuana plants and approximately 1 pound of processed marijuana at a medicinal dispensary, Seven Seas, affiliated with the CASTRO group

- approximately \$50,000 in cash
- 3 vehicles
- 1 uzi
- 1 bulletproof vest.

“Federal, state and local law enforcement are to be commended for their outstanding work on this exhaustive investigation. Their efforts demonstrate an unyielding resolve to fight the increasingly sophisticated and organized tactics of today's drug traffickers,” said United States Attorney Scott.

DEA Special Agent in Charge Javier Pena of the San Francisco Field Division stated, “The ages, nationalities and gender of the defendants are as different as the drugs they trafficked but what remains consistent is the DEA’s commitment to end drug gangs from operating in Northern California. Having the help of our federal and local partners continues to be a major factor in our ability to bring drug traffickers like these to justice.”

Drew Parenti, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI in Sacramento, said "The success of Operation Valley Star is an example of the significant accomplishments that can occur when agencies from the Federal, State and Local level combine resources and manpower to combat critical crime issues in their territory. This investigation has struck a significant blow to Nuestra Familia, a violent prison gang that directs the criminal activities of Norteno street gang members in Northern California."

According to Assistant United States Attorneys Jason Hitt and Karen A. Escobar, who are prosecuting the cases, if convicted of the conspiracy charges, the defendants in each case face a minimum prison sentence of ten years, a maximum term of life, and a fine of \$4,000,000. However, because DIAZ, AMARO, KILLINGER, OCAMPO, STEWART HANSON, GAUNA, CADENA, CARACHEO, and CASTRO have prior felony drug convictions, they are each facing a mandatory minimum prison term of twenty years, a maximum term of life, and a fine of \$8,000,000.

The Sacramento defendants are next scheduled to appear on July 12, 2007, before United States Magistrate Judge Edmund F. Brennan for arraignment and plea on the Sacramento indictment. The Fresno defendants are next scheduled to appear before United States District Judge Anthony W. Ishii on July 30, 2007, for a status conference.

The charges are only allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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