

NEWS RELEASE



***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney
Laura E. Duffy***

For Further Information, Contact: Assistant U. S. Attorneys Todd Robinson (619) 546-7994 or James Melendres (619) 546-7931

For Immediate Release

TOP LIEUTENANT IN FERNANDO SANCHEZ ARELLANO CARTEL SENTENCED

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - December 16, 2013

SAN DIEGO - Armando Villareal Heredia, who was extradited to the United States from Mexico last year to face federal racketeering and drug charges, was sentenced today to 30 years in prison for his role as a leader in the Fernando Sanchez Arellano (FSO) drug trafficking organization and his participation in cartel activities such as murder, kidnapping and the importation and sale of methamphetamine.

Villareal, who was sentenced by U.S. District Judge William Q. Hayes, pleaded guilty in September to Conspiracy to Conduct Enterprise Affairs through a Pattern of Racketeering Activity (RICO conspiracy) and Conspiracy to Distribute Controlled Substances.

“This sentence is a major blow to the Fernando Sanchez Arellano organization,” said U.S. Attorney Laura Duffy. “We and our law enforcement partners are committed to keeping cartel violence out of our communities.”

Villareal acknowledged in his plea agreement that the FSO’s activities included assaults on law enforcement officers attempting to arrest FSO members, bribing public officials to release FSO members from prison, and payments to public officials for confidential law enforcement information.

According to the plea agreement, Villareal also admitted that the cartel attempted to keep rival traffickers, potential informants, witnesses against the cartel, law enforcement, the media and the public in fear through intimidation, threats of violence, assaults and murders, and the organization “taxed” other criminals who operated within FSO territory, which includes Tijuana and parts of San Diego.

Villareal, aka “El Gordo,” was arrested in Sonora, Mexico in July of 2011 and extradited to the U.S. in May of 2012. Villareal is the lead defendant in a 43-defendant prosecution which has been ongoing in the Southern District of California since July 2010. Villareal was arrested by Mexican law enforcement officers at the request of the United States.

To date, 40 of 42 defendants have entered guilty pleas in the case. Like Villareal, those defendants admitted to participating in a violent transnational racketeering enterprise controlled by Fernando Sanchez-Arellano, and to committing murders, kidnappings, robberies, assaults, money laundering and a wide range of drug trafficking offenses. Among those who have pleaded guilty is Jesús Quiñónez Márquez, then- international liaison officer with the Baja California Attorney General’s Office.

Two defendants remain fugitives.

The indictment in this case resulted from a long-term investigation conducted by the multi-agency San Diego Cross Border Violence Task Force (CBVTF). The CBVTF 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 significant evidence which led to the charges in this case.

United States Attorney Duffy praised the Mexican government for their assistance in the extradition of Villareal. She also commended the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) for the coordinated team effort in handling this investigation, “Operation Luz Verde.” Agents and officers from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, San Diego Police Department, Drug Enforcement Administration, San Diego Sheriff’s Office, Chula Vista Police Department, U.S. Marshals Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, San Diego District Attorney’s Office, and California Department of Justice 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.

DEFENDANT

Armando Villareal Heredia

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Case Number 10CR3044-WQH

Title 18, United States Code, Section 1962(d) - Conspiracy to Conduct Enterprise Affairs Through a Pattern of Racketeering Activity

Maximum penalties: Life in prison, Maximum \$250,000 fine, 5 years of supervised release

Title 21, United States Code, Sections 846 and 841(a)(1) - Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine

Maximum penalties: Mandatory Minimum of 10 years in prison; Maximum of Life in prison; Maximum \$10 million fine; 5 years of supervised release

AGENCIES

Federal Bureau of Investigation
San Diego Police Department
Drug Enforcement Administration
San Diego Sheriff's Office
Chula Vista Police Department
U.S. Marshals Service
Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms
California Department of Justice
San Diego District Attorney's Office