



News Releases

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ICE arrests more than 1,000 in largest special operation yet targeting criminal aliens and illegal alien fugitives in California *Three-week enforcement surge results in 420 arrests in the Los Angeles area*

LOS ANGELES - More than 1,000 criminal aliens, immigration fugitives, and immigration violators have been removed from the United States or are facing deportation today following the largest special enforcement operation ever carried out by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Fugitive Operations Teams in California.

During the three-week enforcement surge, which concluded Saturday, ICE officers located and arrested a total of 1,157 immigration violators throughout the state, including 420 here in the Southland. Locally, the Fugitive Operations Teams focused on targets in four area counties - Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino. Of those taken into custody in this area, a total of 308 were immigration fugitives, aliens who have ignored final orders of deportation or who returned to the United States illegally after being removed. Nearly a third of the aliens arrested locally also had criminal histories in addition to being in the country illegally.

"The deployment of more Fugitive Operations Teams, together with enhancements in our ability to track leads in these cases, have resulted in the arrest of record numbers of immigration fugitives this year and we expect that trend to continue," said Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Julie L. Myers, who oversees ICE. "Individuals who defy immigration court orders to leave the country need to understand there are consequences for willfully disregarding the law. ICE is committed to enforcing these outstanding deportation orders and strengthening the integrity of our nation's immigration system."

Among those arrested by the Fugitive Operations Teams locally was a Mexican national whose criminal history includes prior convictions for lewd acts involving a child as well as battery. Jose Isabel Flores Avila, 41, was arrested September 15 in Santa Fe Springs, Calif. Following his arrest, Flores was turned over to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department on an outstanding warrant for making a terrorist threat. Upon his release by local authorities, Flores, who was deported in 2007, will be returned to federal custody for prosecution on felony charges of reentering the country after deportation. Also arrested in the Los Angeles area during the special enforcement operation was a previously deported 47-year-old Mexican national with a prior conviction for selling heroin. Ramon Gaxiola Cedano was taken into custody September 11 at his

residence in North Hollywood. He was turned over to the Los Angeles Police Department on an outstanding narcotics warrant. Once Gaxiola returns to ICE custody, he too will be prosecuted for reentering the country after deportation, a felony charge that carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

In addition to the local Fugitive Operations Teams, ICE officers from the agency's teams in San Francisco and San Diego were temporarily deployed to the area to assist with this enforcement action.

ICE's Fugitive Operations Teams are tasked with identifying and arresting foreign nationals who have ignored final orders of deportation or have returned to the United States illegally after being removed. The teams prioritize cases involving immigration violators who pose a threat to national security and community safety. These include child sexual exploiters, suspected gang members, and those who have convictions for any violent crimes.

Since many of these individuals have already been ordered deported, they are subject to immediate removal from the country. The remaining aliens are in ICE custody and are awaiting a hearing before an immigration judge, or pending travel arrangements for removal in the near future.

The Fugitive Operations Program was established in 2003 to eliminate the nation's backlog of immigration fugitives. Today, ICE has 95 teams in place across the country, including 17 here in California. Currently there are seven active Fugitive Operations Teams in the Southland - four based in Los Angeles County, two in the Inland Empire and one in Orange County. ICE expects to deploy an eighth team to the Southland by the end of this year. That team will be based in Ventura County.

As a result of the efforts of the Fugitive Operations Teams, the nation's fugitive alien population continues to decline. Estimates now place the number of immigration fugitives in the United States at slightly under 560,000, a decrease of more than 34,000 since October 2007.

ICE's Fugitive Operations Program is an integral part of the comprehensive multi-year plan launched by the Department of Homeland Security to secure America's borders and reduce illegal migration. That strategy seeks to gain operational control of both the northern and southern borders, while re-engineering the detention and removal system to ensure that illegal aliens are removed from the country quickly and efficiently.

EDITOR'S NOTE: DVDs featuring ICE b-roll of this latest operation are available. The footage was shot in Los Angeles and San Francisco. In addition, Brian DeMore, field office director for ICE Detention and Removal Operations in Los Angeles, will be available for follow-up interviews today from 10:45 to 11:45 a.m. and from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. To schedule an interview or obtain a copy of the b-roll DVD, call ICE public affairs at (949) 360-3096.

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.

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