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MARCH 21, 2011 LOS ANGELES, CA

Leader of alien smuggling ring with ties to local street gang sentenced to 25 years in prison

LOS ANGELES - The leader of a human smuggling organization with ties to the Avenues street gang was sentenced Monday to 25 years in federal prison, one of the longest prison terms ever imposed locally in an alien smuggling case.

Eduardo "Tito" Alvarez-Marquez, 37, of Glassell Park, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Philip S. Gutierrez. Last September, a federal jury convicted Alvarez-Marquez of two felony counts - conspiracy to smuggle into the United States aliens who were previously convicted of aggravated felonies and harboring an illegal alien. Alvarez-Marquez had already pleaded guilty to another alien-smuggling conspiracy.

The Alvarez-Marquez smuggling organization was responsible for bringing at least 200 illegal aliens per year into the United States, and the aliens paid up to \$4,500 in smuggling fees. Evidence presented at his trial showed that the Alvarez-Marquez organization charged criminal aliens a premium to be smuggled into the United States inside hidden compartments in vehicles. In one incident described to the jury, Alvarez-Marquez refused to release an ailing 3-month-old infant to its family until a \$1,200 smuggling fee was paid. Judge Gutierrez on March 21 found that the Alvarez-Marquez organization was responsible for a July 2009 smuggling incident in which 26 aliens were discovered locked inside a freezer truck in Imperial, Calif.

As part of the conspiracy, Alvarez-Marquez agreed to smuggle the matriarch of the notorious Drew Street clique of the Avenues street gang, Maria Leon, back into the country after her son engaged in a shootout with the Los Angeles Police Department. Leon is currently serving a 100-month federal prison sentence for racketeering crimes related to the Avenues street gang.

Alvarez-Marquez was one of nine defendants charged in October 2009 as part of a probe by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) into the Alvarez organization.

"The severity of this sentence is absolutely appropriate given the ruthless nature of the smuggling trade and specifically the tactics used by this organization," said Claude Arnold, special agent in charge of the ICE HSI in Los Angeles. "As human smugglers have shown time and time again, they have no qualms about putting their clients and our communities at risk in hopes of turning a profit."

Judge Gutierrez sentenced a second defendant Monday in this case. Ruben Servin-Mejia, 38, of Calexico, was sentenced to 51 months in federal prison. Servin-Mejia was responsible for arranging covert transportation for the ring's smuggling clients, including arranging for the freezer truck found to contain 26 aliens.

The following six defendants in this case were previously sentenced by Judge Gutierrez:

- Teodoro Alvarez-Estrada, 58, of Los Angeles, Alvarez's father, was sentenced to 188 months on human smuggling and drug trafficking charges;
- Aquilina Alvarez, 57, of Glassell Park, Alvarez's mother, was sentenced to 57 months;

- Maria Toledo Fierros, 51, of Calexico, was sentenced to 70 months;
- Yesenia Rubi Mendoza, 23, of Mexicali, Alvarez's girlfriend, was sentenced to 33 months;
- Jose Carreon, 49, of Holtville, Calif., was sentenced to 41 months; and
- Martina Araceli Carreon, 46, also of Holtville, was sentenced to 33 months.

The ninth defendant charged in this case - Rosario Maria Rodriguez-Ortiz, 27, of Los Angeles - is a fugitive.

ICE HSI received substantial assistance with the investigation from U.S. Customs and Border Protection Border Patrol and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

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