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JUSTICE NEWS

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, November 23, 2010

Man Found Guilty for Forcing Women and Juveniles into Prostitution

WASHINGTON - A federal jury today convicted Amador Cortes-Meza, 36, of Mexico, of multiple charges of sex trafficking and human smuggling offenses related to a scheme to force women and juveniles into prostitution. The jury found Cortes-Meza guilty on all 19 counts after a trial lasting approximately two weeks.

"The exploitation of these vulnerable individuals is a violation of the fundamental rights on which our country was founded, and is intolerable in a nation that prides itself on freedom," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "The Department of Justice will continue to prosecute vigorously the trafficking of human beings to vindicate the rights of those held in modern-day slavery, whether for labor or for sexual exploitation."

U.S. Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said, "This defendant preyed on the most vulnerable of victims--girls and young women hoping for a better life-- through promises of jobs or marriage. He then physically abused them, enslaved them, and forced them into prostitution. This trial provided a glimpse into the monstrous world of human trafficking. We are committed to giving voice to the victims of these horrific crimes and holding the defendants accountable for their crimes."

"We hope that the victims who suffered at the hands of this monster can breathe a sigh of relief knowing that justice has been served," said Brock Nicholson, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) office that oversees the Carolinas and Georgia. "We are committed to working with our local, state and federal partners to target human traffickers who think that their heinous crimes will go unchecked."

According to the evidence presented in court, from Spring 2006 through June 2008, Amador Cortes-Meza and others charged in the conspiracy recruited and enticed approximately 10 victims to enter the United States illegally from Mexico and come to the Atlanta area. Amador Cortes-Meza then forced them into prostitution for the financial benefit of the members of the conspiracy. He lured the young women and girls to the U.S. by promising better lives, legitimate employment or romantic relationships with him. A brother and two nephews of Amador Cortes-Meza were previously convicted after pleading guilty to sex trafficking charges related to this scheme.

Nine of the victims addressed the court about what they suffered at the hands of this sex trafficking ring, telling of physical threats, beatings, and intimidation which caused them to work as prostitutes against their will. Evidence at trial showed that after smuggling the victims into the United States, Amador Cortes-Meza forced them to engage in prostitution by isolating them from their families, brutally beating them, and threatening to harm them and their loved ones. One victim testified that he told her that "he was going to hit her where it hurt the most" and she took that to mean he was going to go after her family. Another victim testified that the defendant told her he would kill her parents in Mexico if he was ever arrested. On a nightly basis, Amador Cortes-Meza provided the victims to drivers who drove them to apartments and homes in Duluth, Ga.; Chamblee, Ga.; Canton, Ga.; Marietta, Ga.; Forrest Park, Ga.; and as far away as Alabama and North Carolina to provide commercial sex to as many as 40 customers a night. The victims testified that the clients were charged \$25-30 for 10 to 15 minutes of time with them from which the drivers were given \$10.

The jury convicted Amador Cortes-Meza on 19 counts, including offenses of sex trafficking by force, fraud and coercion; sex trafficking of minors; conspiracy; importation and harboring of aliens for the purposes of prostitution; and smuggling aliens into the United States. Amador Cortes-Meza faces a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Human trafficking prosecutions are a top priority for the Justice Department. The Department of Homeland Security Tip Line to report trafficking crimes is 1-866-347-2423.

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This case was investigated by ICE/HSI Special Agents assigned to the Atlanta Special Agent in Charge office.

Deputy Chief Karima Maloney of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and Assistant U.S. Attorney Susan Coppedge prosecuted the case.

10-1347

Civil Rights Division

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