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News Releases

JANUARY 27, 2011 HOUSTON, TX

Last of 3 sentenced for smuggling, harboring an illegal alien resulting in death

HOUSTON - A Houston woman was sentenced to 22 months imprisonment for conspiring to transport and harbor an illegal alien within the United States resulting in his death announced U.S. Attorney José Angel Moreno on Thursday. The case was investigated by agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) with the assistance provided by Houston Police Department (HPD) and Brazoria County Sheriff's Office (BCSO).

Mary Jesse Cuadros, 24, of Houston, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Lee H. Rosenthal. She has been in custody since her May 1, 2009 arrest, and will remain in federal custody through her transfer to a Bureau of Prisons facility where she will serve out her sentence. Cuadros pleaded guilty to the felony immigration offense on June 28, 2010.

Court records show that relatives and friends of a Honduran national, who had been illegally smuggled into United States, received a series of phone calls from alien smugglers demanding the payment of smuggling fees for him. The smugglers also told the relatives and friends that their family member/friend was very ill. On April 27, 2009, the Brazoria County Sheriff's Office responded to a call that a body had been found in Brazoria County. A Honduran driver's license was found on the body, which identified the victim.

ICE HSI agents initiated an investigation based on information from phone numbers used by the smugglers. The agents then established surveillance at a trailer park in the 13000 block of Hooper in Harris County, Texas. A traffic stop of a vehicle leaving one of the trailers was conducted and agents made contact with Cuadros. Meanwhile, another agent who had continued to maintain surveillance at Cuadros' residence saw Amancio Aburto-Gamino and another co-defendant Lucero Aburto arrive in a vehicle. Aburto, having received a phone call from Cuadros that agents were on the way, ran into the trailer to warn the occupants. Agents arrested Aburto-Gamino and Aburto.

Inside the trailer, agents discovered a "pollo" list, a slang term used for describing ledgers used by alien smugglers to keep information regarding smuggled aliens, contact numbers to obtain smuggling fees, and fees paid to the smugglers. The list contained the names of 27 illegally smuggled aliens. A pistol and numerous cell phones were also discovered.

ICE HSI agents also searched a second trailer belonging to Cuadros. They discovered trash bags and maroon curtains there which matched those used to wrap the body of the victim. Through further investigation, agents learned that the victim had been extremely ill when he was delivered to the trailer by an unidentified smuggler. Aburto purchased a drink for the victim who drank it, went into a bathroom, collapsed and died. An autopsy conducted later by the Galveston County Medical Examiner's Office was unable to determine the cause of death.

Through the interviews with the aliens, Gabriel Guzman-Villa was identified as having been involved in the alien smuggling business for at least two years with his wife, Cuadros, and stepfather, Aburto-Gamino. Guzman-Villa was identified as having dumped the body of the victim on the side of the road.

Aburto-Gamino, 48, and Guzman-Villa, 28, both illegal aliens from Mexico, were sentenced on Dec. 8, 2010 to 27 and 51 months imprisonment, respectively. They will face deportation proceedings after they complete their sentences. Aburto was charged with misprision of a felony and was sentenced on Aug. 20, 2010 to time served, and faces deportation proceedings.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Doug Davis, Southern District of Texas, prosecuted the case.

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