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News Releases

MAY 12, 2011 SAVANNAH, GA

Dominican national sentenced to more than 24 years for smuggling heroin and cocaine through Port of Savannah

SAVANNAH, Ga. - Jose Orlando Garcia Duran, 33, a native of the Dominican Republic, was sentenced Wednesday to 286 months in federal prison for his role in smuggling cocaine and heroin through the Port of Savannah.

The case was the result of a joint investigation conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Georgia Ports Authority Police Department. These agencies are members of the Maritime Interagency Center of Operations (MICO), created in 2007 to prevent and deter criminal activity and acts of terrorism in the Georgia Ports of Savannah and Brunswick.



"This case is a direct result of the collaborative investigative efforts of state, local and federal law enforcement agencies, who are working together to protect the Port of Savannah - the second largest seaport on the east coast - from the smuggling of drugs, weapons, people and other contraband," said Brock Nicholson, special agent in charge of ICE HSI in Atlanta. "Working in conjunction with our agency partners, HSI is aggressively and effectively disrupting and dismantling the criminal networks that attempt to use our seaports to circumvent detection and threaten our national security."

Garcia Duran and codefendant Angel Gomez were convicted after a two-day jury trial on several charges relating to the smuggling of \$500,000 worth of heroin and cocaine through the Port of Savannah. The evidence at trial showed that in March of 2010, Georgia Ports Authority Police became aware that three men disguised as longshoremen, who had disembarked the M/V Cosco Boston, a Chinese merchant vessel arriving from Panama, had boarded a taxi to take them to the gate of the Garden City Terminal.

When the taxi driver advised the men to have their identification ready, they jumped out of the taxi and ran into a wooded area. The three men, including Garcia Duran and Gomez, were eventually apprehended in the woods, where approximately four kilograms of cocaine and two kilograms of heroin were also found. At the time of arrest, Gomez confessed that he had been involved in bringing the drugs into the United States. The third man, Rodrigo Temple Wood, testified against Gomez and Garcia Duran at trial, explaining that the three men brought the drugs from Panama, each carrying two kilograms inside the back support belts they wore as part of their disguises. They were to meet the recipient of the drugs in Savannah.

Garcia Duran is the second of the three defendants indicted for the smuggling conspiracy to be sentenced. Wood pled guilty and was sentenced in August of 2010 to 76 months in prison. Gomez still awaits sentencing. Both Gomez and Garcia Duran have previous drug trafficking convictions and were previously deported from the United States. Mr. Tarver noted that there is no parole in the federal system. All three defendants will face deportation after completion of their prison terms.

U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia Edward J. Tarver stated, "Because of its size and the huge amount of traffic from all corners of the world, drug traffickers and other criminals target the Port of Savannah to conduct their unlawful operations. This case shows that our federal, state and local law enforcement are trained to detect, apprehend and prosecute those criminals who seek to operate illegal operations out of the Port of Savannah. The next stop for criminals who attempt to smuggle drugs or other items through the Port of Savannah will be a federal prison cell."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Cameron Heaps Ippolito prosecuted this case.

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