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News Releases

JULY 21, 2011 RICHMOND, VA

Two members of sophisticated fraudulent document ring sentenced

RICHMOND, Va. - Two members of a highly sophisticated and violent fraudulent document trafficking organization based in Mexico, with cells in 19 cities within the United States and 11 states, including three cells in Virginia, have been sentenced for their roles in the operation.

This week, Jorge Alejandro Gonzalez-Garcia, 35, of Mishawaka, Ind. was sentenced to 42 months in prison; and Ricardo Patino Vargas, 31, of Pawtucket, R.I., was sentenced to 43 months in prison, each after pleading guilty to racketeering conspiracy.

According to the indictment, Israel Cruz Millan, a/k/a "El Muerto," 28, of Raleigh, N.C., managed the organization's operations in the United States, overseeing 19 cells in 11 states, including three in Virginia that produced high-quality false identification cards to illegal aliens. In each city where the organization operated, Millan placed a cell manager to supervise a number of "runners," the lower level members of the organization who distributed business cards advertising the organization's services and helped facilitate transactions with customers. The cost of fraudulent documents varied depending on the location, with counterfeit resident alien and Social Security cards typically selling from \$150 to \$200. Each cell allegedly maintained detailed sales records and divided the proceeds between the runner, the cell manager and the upper level managers in Mexico. The indictment states that from January 2008 through November 2010, members of the organization wired more than \$1 million to Mexico.

The indictment alleges that members of the organization sought to drive competitors from their territory by posing as customers in search of fraudulent documents and then attacking the competitors when they arrived to make a sale. These attacks allegedly included binding the victims' hands, feet and mouth; repeatedly beating them; and threatening them with death if they continued to sell false identification documents in the area. It is charged that the victims were left bound at the scene of the attack, and the indictment states that at least one victim died from the beatings.

Cruz Millan is accused of tightly controlling the organization's activities by keeping in regular contact with cell managers about fraudulent document inventory, biweekly sales reports and the presence of any rival document vendors. The indictment alleges that members of the organization who violated internal rules imposed by Millan were subject to discipline, including shaving eyebrows, wearing weights, beatings and other violent acts.

According to court filings, Gonzalez-Garcia was the supervisor of the cell located in Mishawaka, and pleaded guilty on April 24, 2011. Vargas supervised the Pawtucket cell, and he pleaded guilty on April 18, 2011.

Twenty-seven members of the organization were originally arrested on Nov. 18, 2010.

To date, 21 of those arrested have pleaded guilty in this case. A trial has been scheduled for the six remaining defendants for Oct. 17, 2011.

The investigation was centered in the Norfolk, Va., office of ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), which falls under the Washington, D.C., office. ICE HSI received assistance from the Virginia State Police and Chesterfield County Police

Department. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Michael Gill and Angela Mastandrea-Miller and Trial Attorney Addison Thompson, of the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section, are prosecuting the case.

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