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## News Releases



FEBRUARY 7, 2013 LOS ANGELES, CA

### **Key player in large-scale human smuggling ring sentenced to 8 years in prison Judge cites tactics of smuggling trade in imposing lengthy prison term**

LOS ANGELES — A Guatemalan national who admitted playing a central role in a large-scale human smuggling organization that brought thousands of illegal aliens from Central America to Southern California, often holding them against their will in so-called drop houses, has been sentenced to eight years in federal prison.

Fredy Oswaldo Gamez Reyes, 44, was sentenced Wednesday by Judge S. James Otero, who pointed to the smuggling organization's tactics, including the use of weapons and guard dogs to intimidate the illegal aliens, as the basis for the 96-month prison term.

Gamez pleaded guilty in May 2012 to six criminal counts of harboring and concealing illegal aliens for financial gain, following a probe by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). According to court documents, Gamez acknowledged he served as a supervisor for a criminal organization that smuggled more than 6,000 illegal aliens into Southern California during a three-year period, beginning in 2008, generating an estimated \$10 million in income.

HSI's probe revealed Gamez held a number of jobs within the organization, including locating and renting drop houses, overseeing the operation of those locations, and collecting smuggling fees from the illegal aliens' relatives in exchange for the illegal aliens' release. HSI's investigation also uncovered numerous incidents perpetrated by members of the organization involving beatings, sexual assaults and hostage taking.

"As this sentence makes clear, those who exploit people in this brutal and despicable way will themselves face serious consequences," said Claude Arnold, special agent in charge for HSI Los Angeles. "Alien smugglers view their clients as nothing more than a pay day and they have no qualms about using threats and violence to collect their smuggling fees."

The smuggling organization originally came to authorities' attention in July 2009 after HSI special agents and Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputies responded to a drop house in Compton where 20 individuals were reportedly being held against their will. Two of the captive aliens wrote a plea for help on a napkin and threw it out the window, where it was found by neighborhood children.

Evidence uncovered during the ensuing the investigation showed Gamez was responsible for overseeing the operation of the Compton location, along with three other human smuggling drop houses in Baldwin Park, Lynwood and Hesperia.

HSI's investigation into this smuggling organization is ongoing. To date, 11 other individuals involved in the ring have been arrested and/or convicted of federal charges, resulting in sentences of 33 to 51 months.

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