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## **COLOMBIAN MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO CONSPIRING TO SUPPORT THE FARC**

WASHINGTON – A Colombian man pleaded guilty to conspiracy for his role in attempting to provide material support to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a designated foreign terrorist organization, Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division and Assistant Attorney General Kenneth L. Wainstein of the National Security Division announced today.

Bernardo Valdes Londono, 49, of Pereira, Colombia, pleaded guilty in Miami before U.S. District Judge Joan A. Lenard to one count of conspiracy to provide material support or resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization.

In pleading guilty, Valdes admitted that between approximately July 12, 2005, and Jan. 3, 2006, he conspired with others to facilitate travel for an informant posing as a FARC chief who needed to leave Colombia and go to the United States. Valdes offered to provide a valid but fraudulently obtained U.S. visa from a contact in the Colombian federal government. He also offered to use his official connections within the state comptroller's office and district attorney's office in Bogota to register the informant at the International Red Cross. Under this approach, Valdes advised, the informant could travel to whatever country he desired, could completely change his identity, and would have the option to work in the United States.

Ultimately Valdes suggested and implemented a scheme whereby the informant traveled from Bogota to Panama City, Panama, on a fraudulently obtained Colombian passport provided by one of Valdes's co-conspirators. In Panama, Valdes advised that the informant would use a fraudulently obtained Spanish passport – also provided by a co-conspirator – to board a Miami-bound flight. Valdez was confident that the fraudulent Spanish passport would allow the informant to pass Miami immigration because holders of Spanish passports are not required to obtain visas to enter the United States.

To add additional security and sophistication to his smuggling scheme, Valdes offered to alter airline passenger lists and arranged for the informant's false Spanish passport to be stamped with a Panamanian immigration entry stamp, thereby giving the appearance that the holder of the passport had legitimately arrived in Panama from Spain. Valdes also introduced the informant to his airport security contact, who guaranteed the informant's passage through immigration and security controls at Panama City's Tocumen International Airport. On Sept. 21, 2005, the

informant took advantage of Valdes' criminal offers and traveled from Panama to Miami using his fraudulent Spanish passport.

In addition to smuggling a believed FARC chief to the United States, Valdes offered to introduce the informant to money launderers in Miami. He also introduced him to an individual who offered to transport bulk quantities of drugs on commercial aircraft to the United States and sell the informant arms of any type that he could obtain from Panamanian police supplies. Valdez charged \$2,500 for his services.

Valdes was one of 10 individuals indicted by a Miami federal grand jury on terrorism, alien smuggling, and money laundering charges on Jan. 3, 2006. Pursuant to a U.S. provisional arrest warrant, Valdes was arrested in Pereira, Colombia, on Jan. 26, 2006. Two other defendants have pleaded guilty to terrorism charges in the case. Trial for the remaining seven defendants is set for Jan. 22, 2008.

Valdes faces up to 15 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Sentencing before Judge Lenard is scheduled for Jan. 4, 2008.

The case was investigated by the Office of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Attache in Bogota, Colombia, with assistance from the Office of the ICE Attache in Panama City, Panama. Trial Attorney Brian Skaret of the Domestic Security Section of the Department of Justice prosecuted the case. Support was provided by attorneys Thomas Black and Jerry McMillen of the Justice Department's Office of International Affairs, judicial attache in Colombia. The Justice Department's National Security Division provided assistance to the prosecution, and Assistant United States Attorney William White of the Southern District of Florida served as local counsel on the case. Valuable support was also provided by Colombian and Panamanian authorities.

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