



*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

PRESS RELEASE

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TWO FELONS SENTENCED TO 70 MONTHS IN PRISON FOR CONSPIRACY TO UNLAWFULLY ACQUIRE OVER 100 FIREARMS

PHOENIX - Paul K. Charlton, U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona, and Lester D. Martz, Special Agent in Charge for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, announced that on August 23, 2004, Francisco Johnny Ramirez, DOB 3/9/77, of Mesa, Ariz., and Jose Roberto Gonzalez, DOB 7/3/67, of Maywood, Calif., were each sentenced to 70 months in prison for Conspiracy, three counts of False Statements in Connection with the Acquisition of Firearms, and Felon in Possession of Firearms before District Judge David G. Campbell in Phoenix. Ramirez was also sentenced for Possession of Marijuana With Intent to Distribute.

In the course of their guilty pleas on February 2, 2004, Ramirez and Gonzalez admitted that beginning on June 8, 2002, and continuing through April 12, 2003, they, along with a third person (the Straw Purchaser), conspired to make false statements in connection with the acquisition of firearms from federally licensed firearms dealers. On June 8, 2002, Ramirez asked the Straw

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Purchaser to purchase firearms and told him he would be paid for his services. On the same date, the Straw Purchaser went to Jewel Box, Inc., 601 North Central, Phoenix, a federally licensed firearms dealer, and purchased five firearms for Gonzalez and Ramirez. When purchasing the firearms, the Straw Purchaser represented to the dealer that he was the purchaser of the firearms when, in fact, Gonzalez and Ramirez were the actual purchasers.

On September 7, 2002, the Straw Purchaser returned to Jewel Box, Inc., and unlawfully purchased six handguns on behalf of Gonzalez and Ramirez. On September 7, 2002, the Straw Purchaser went to Windy City Pawn Brokers, 302 West Indian School, Phoenix, a different federally licensed firearms dealer, and unlawfully purchased 15 firearms on behalf of Gonzalez and Ramirez.

On November 23, 2002, the Straw Purchaser returned to Windy City Pawn Brokers and unlawfully purchased 52 semi-automatic firearms on behalf of Gonzalez and Ramirez. On April 12, 2003, Gonzalez and Ramirez furnished the Straw Purchaser over \$5,000 in U.S. currency. The two then instructed the Straw Purchaser to return to Windy City Pawn Brokers and unlawfully purchase an additional 35 firearms on their behalf, which he did.

Gonzalez further admitted that on November 23, 2002, he knowingly possessed 52 semi-automatic handguns while having been previously convicted of Possession of a Controlled Substance, Phencyclidine, a felony, in the Superior Court of California, Los Angeles County, Calif., on October 17, 1988 and while having been previously convicted of Conspiracy to Unlawfully Transport Marijuana for Sale, in the Superior Court of Arizona, Pima County, Ariz. on May 1, 2000. Ramirez also admitted that he knowingly possessed three semi-automatic handguns and knowingly possessed with intent to distribute approximately 1.36 kilograms of marijuana on April 12, 2003. The three additional firearms and marijuana were found by ATF

on April 12, 2003, in Ramirez's family car which was parked in front of his Mesa, Ariz. residence.

At sentencing, the government advised the Court that on April 12, 2003, ATF was able to seize the 35 handguns Gonzalez and Ramirez had illegally purchased that same day and the three additional firearms Ramirez had stored at his residence. A picture of the 38 handguns was submitted as an exhibit for the Court's consideration at sentencing. A copy of the exhibit is attached to this release. The government also noted that Gonzalez was found in possession of \$1,600 and Ramirez was found in possession of \$416 when they were arrested by ATF on April 12, 2003. Judge Campbell then imposed fines on the individual defendants in the same amounts.

This prosecution is a significant success for the District of Arizona's Project Safe Neighborhood's firearms enforcement program. One of the key ongoing priorities of Project Safe Neighborhoods is the apprehension and prosecution of individuals who illegally acquire large quantities of firearms from licensed dealers as such prosecutions help to reduce illegal trafficking in firearms throughout the United States.

Convictions for Conspiracy in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 371; False Statements in Connection with the Acquisition of Firearms in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 924(a)(1)(A); and Possession of Marijuana with Intent to Distribute (1.36 kilograms) in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1), each carry maximum penalties of five years in prison, a \$250,000.00 fine or both. A conviction for Felon in Possession of a Firearm in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1) carries a maximum penalty of ten years in prison, a \$250,000 fine or both.

The investigation was conducted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives with assistance from the Mesa Police Department.

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