

News Release

U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
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Gregory A. White, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio; Brian M. Moskowitz, Special Agent in Charge, U. S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Office of Investigations for Ohio and Michigan, Detroit, Michigan; and Robin M. Dalglish, Inspector in Charge, Pittsburgh Division, United States Postal Inspection Service, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, today announced that Manuel Valdez-Gomez was sentenced to 120 months incarceration on charges related to alien smuggling, mail fraud and money laundering. Valdez-Gomez had previously plead guilty on January 23, 2007 to the following charges related to his leadership of multiple conspiracies: conspiracy to smuggle aliens into and within the United States; conspiracy to commit mail fraud, wire fraud, document fraud, structuring money transactions and money laundering; four counts of aiding and abetting bringing aliens into the United States, aiding and abetting mail fraud and aiding and abetting the structuring of money transactions and two counts of aiding and abetting money laundering.

On April 24, 2007, Jesus Sosa-Ortiz, son-in-law of Manuel Valdez-Gomez and his right-hand assistant until his apprehension two years ago on charges of illegal reentry following deportation, was sentenced to 96 months incarceration. Sosa-Ortiz had previously pled guilty on January 23, 2007 to conspiracy to smuggle aliens into and within the United States; conspiracy to commit mail fraud, wire fraud, document fraud, structuring money transactions and money laundering; aiding and abetting bringing aliens into the United States; Social Security fraud, and aggravated identity theft.

Also sentenced on April 24, 2007 were two of Manuel Valdez-Gomez' children: Ismael Valdez, a driver for the criminal organization, to 60 months incarceration and Yolanda Sosa, a money launderer for the criminal organization, to 46 months incarceration.

As part of the sentences, aggregate forfeitures were ordered of numerous real properties in the Phoenix, Arizona area which were either used to facilitate the criminal activity charged in the superseding indictment and/or constituted proceeds of that criminal activity. Proceeds and uncashed money orders were also ordered forfeited, as well as a number of firearms and ammunition. Additionally, a hotel and restaurant located in Nogales, Mexico, purchased by Manuel Valdez-Gomez with criminal proceeds and used to facilitate the staging of aliens to be smuggled across the border was ordered forfeited. The aggregate value of the forfeited properties exceeds \$1 million.

To date, twenty-two of the twenty-four co-defendants named in the superseding indictment filed May 9, 2006 have been sentenced; one additional co-defendant has pled guilty to federal charges and awaits sentencing next week; and one charged co-defendant, Ricardo Aranda-Moreno, remains a fugitive. Lengths of sentences are detailed in the attachment to this press release.

The charges arose from an investigation which revealed the following:

Since 1997, Manuel Valdez-Gomez, a native of Mexico and a lawful permanent resident

alien living in the Phoenix, Arizona area, led an alien smuggling organization with members of his immediate family and others. For a fee of between \$1,800 and \$2,000 each, aliens would be smuggled across the border from Mexico to the Nogales, Arizona area. During the course of the conspiracy, hundreds of undocumented aliens were smuggled into the United States. Once across the border, the conspirators then used motor vehicles and a network of safe houses to transport the smuggled aliens first to Phoenix, Arizona and thereafter to various interior states, including Ohio. Fees were collected by the drivers and would be sent back to Manuel Valdez-Gomez by wire transfer, money orders or cash. Other conspirators would assist the drivers in either sending or receiving the wire transfers and express mail packages containing money orders.

“ICE will not allow alien smuggling organizations to use Northern Ohio as a destination for their human cargo,” said Special Agent in Charge Moskowitz. “Today’s sentencing should remind all citizens that the actions of smugglers pose a very real threat to our nation’s border security and that ICE special agents here in Cleveland and around the country with the assistance of all law-abiding citizens stand ready to bring them to justice.”

ICE initiated the joint investigation with the United States Postal Inspection Service. Assisting in the investigation were the following law enforcement agencies: the Cleveland, Phoenix and Grand Rapids offices of ICE (including the Asset Identification and Removal Group in Phoenix); the Cleveland, Phoenix and Grand Rapids offices of the United States Postal Inspection Service; the United States Border Patrol; the Painesville Police Department; the Ohio State Highway Patrol; the Lake County Narcotics Agency; the Lake County Sheriff’s Office; the Eastlake Police Department and the United States Attorney’s Offices in Phoenix and Grand Rapids. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Phillip J. Tripi, Gary D. Arbeznik and James L. Morford.

PRESS RELEASE ATTACHMENT

United States v. Manuel Valdez-Gomez, et al.

<u>Defendant</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Residence</u>	<u>Sentence</u>
Manuel Valdez-Gomez, aka Manuel Valdez aka Manuel G. Valdez aka "Polo"	56	5927 W. Avalon Phoenix, AZ	120 months
Jesus Sosa-Ortiz, aka Jesus Sosa aka Andres Asencion Ortiz	29	6405 W. La Reata Ave. Phoenix, AZ	96 months
Rafael Valdez-Gomez, aka Rafael Valdez aka Rafa	54	2515 E. Adams Phoenix, AZ	Sentencing set 05-16-07
Yolanda Sosa, aka Yolanda Valdez	28	6405 W. LaReata Ave. Phoenix, AZ	46 months
Patricia Hernandez, aka Patricia Valdez	34	6334 W. Mulberry Dr. Phoenix, AZ	6 months home detention
Tomas Valdez-Gomez, aka Tomas Valdez	46	666 McReynolds Ave., NW Grand Rapids, MI	30 months
Ricardo Aranda-Moreno, aka Ricardo Aranda aka Ricardo Aranda Ornelas aka Rodlofo Herrera aka Pedro Chavez, aka Ernesto Soto	30	904 E. Brinker Ave. Avondale, AZ	Fugitive
Jose Santana Aranda-Flores, aka Jose Santa Ana Aranda-Flores aka Santana aka "Cholo" aka Jose Aranda Hernandez aka Ernesto Soto	27	414 Marion Pl., NW Grand Rapids, MI	60 months
Jaime Hernandez-Ornelas, aka Jaime Ornelas	34	904-908 E. Brinker Ave. Avondale, AZ	37 months
J. Santana Hernandez-Gomez, aka Santana Hernandez aka Santana aka Santana G. Hernandez	36	6955 W. Northview Ave. Glendale, AZ	72 months
Romulo Hernandez	38	6334 W. Mulberry Drive Phoenix, AZ	8 months home detention
Aurora Valdez, aka Aurora Ortiz	50	5927 W. Avalon Phoenix, AZ	6 months home detention
Manuel Valdez Jr., aka Buba	24	7334 W. Vermont Ave. Glendale, AZ	6 months home detention

PRESS RELEASE ATTACHMENT

United States v. Manuel Valdez-Gomez, et al. (Continued)

<u>Defendant</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Residence</u>	<u>Sentence</u>
Jesus Flores-Carmona, aka "Chuy"	29	904 E. Brinker Ave. Phoenix, AZ	51 months
Isaias Garcia-Hernandez, aka Isaias Garcia aka Isaias Garcia aka Garcia Torres	41	33 Kensington Ave., Apt. D Painesville, OH	18 months
Ismael Valdez, aka Jimmy Valdez aka Faustino Martinez	36	6334 W. Mulberry Drive Phoenix, AZ	60 months
Guadalupe J. Hernandez, aka Jose Guadalupe Hernandez aka "Zorra" aka Guadalupe Hernandez	52	318 Hayer Street Painesville, OH	24 months
Jose Valdez, aka Jose Valdez-Bermudez	59	4342 W. Cherry Lynn Road Phoenix, AZ	11 months home detention
Elidia Hernandez, aka Elidia Saldana De Hernandez	33	6955 W. Northview Ave. Glendale, AZ	6 months home detention
Simon Valdez-Amaro	27	666 McReynolds Ave., NW Grand Rapids, MI	5 months & 5 months home detention
Martin Valdez	25	51 Manzana Ct., NW. , Apt. 2C Grand Rapids, MI	30 months
Juan Loza-Aranda	22	906 E. Brinker Drive Avondale, AZ	51 months
Albaro Loza-Aranda	25	Rancho Los Ramirez Municipio De Leon Gunajuato, Mexico	45 months
Isidro Aranda, aka Isidro Aranda-Flores	25	902 E. Brinker Drive Avondale, AZ	70 months