

NEWS

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Colombian Cartel Leader Brought to New Jersey to Face Federal Charges

(More)

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NEWARK – Salomon Camacho Mora, a reputed Colombian cartel leader, was brought from Venezuela to New Jersey yesterday evening to face federal conspiracy, drug trafficking and money laundering charges, announced U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman and FBI Acting Special Agent in Charge Kevin B. Cruise.

Camacho, 65, a citizen of Colombia, a.k.a. “Papa Grande,” “El Viejo” and “Hector,” was arrested in Valencia, Venezuela, on Jan. 13, 2010, by Venezuelan authorities. Camacho, who has been designated a Consolidated Priority Organization Target (CPOT) by the Department of Justice, had been a New Jersey FBI fugitive for over eight years.

Camacho was originally indicted in September 2002 in U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey. On Aug. 9, 2005, a grand jury returned an eight-count Superseding Indictment charging Camacho and four co-defendants with one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, five counts of laundering of monetary instruments and one count each of conspiracy to commit narcotics trafficking and narcotics trafficking.

Camacho made his initial appearance in U.S. District Court today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Mark Falk in Newark. Judge Falk ordered the defendant to be detained pending trial, which is scheduled for April 13.

The Superseding Indictment describes a scheme in which Camacho led an organization that smuggled large quantities of cocaine from Colombia to the United States, via Venezuela and Puerto Rico. According to the Indictment, Camacho and members of his drug organization purchased multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine from various cocaine processing laboratories in Colombia and arranged for the transportation of the cocaine loads to various shipping ports in Venezuela. Once the shipments arrived in Venezuela, Camacho and coconspirators allegedly sold cocaine to other drug trafficking organizations operating in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and the United States. Camacho and his co-conspirators also arranged for maritime transportation of drug shipments to Puerto Rico and the United States, where they later sold the cocaine. According to the Indictment, the alleged drug transactions generated large profits for the defendants, which they then wire transferred out of the United States using various bank accounts.

According to the U.S. Department of State, Camacho allegedly began his drug trafficking career in the 1980's with the Colombian Medellin Cartel and then became partners with Alberto Orlandez Gamboa, a powerful leader of the Colombian North Coast Cartel. Camacho allegedly had a series of other drug trafficking partnerships, including with the Orejuela brothers of the Cali Cartel and, from 1998 to the present, he worked in partnership with Hermagoras Gonzalez Polanco, in what is often referred to as the Guajira Cartel, a State Department advisory indicated. The State Department advisory alleges that Camacho and Gonzalez Polanco were responsible for sending many tons of cocaine to the United States, including as much as 9 metric tons between 1999 and 2000 and reportedly had strong ties to Dominican drug trafficking organizations, which paid for the drugs. The Guajira Cartel is known to use violence, intimidation, extortion, and murder to further their organization's success. The State Department offered a \$5 million reward for Camacho's arrest.

“Camacho’s arrest and his arrival in New Jersey sends a very clear message to other drug kingpins outside our borders,” said Fishman. “It may have taken some time, but this major cartel leader has been brought to justice as will others who engage in similar conduct.”

"We consider Salomon Camacho Mora a significant figure in the drug trafficking underworld," said Kevin Cruise, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Newark Field Office. "This arrest will effectively send a powerful message to other major crime figures around the world: the FBI never forgets, and we don't give up. We thank our FBI and DEA counterparts in Caracas, Venezuela and Bogota, Columbia, our partners in the National Guard Counter Drug Task Force for their unwavering commitment and dedication, the IRS, and the governments of Columbia and Venezuela, all without whom this arrest would not have been possible."

The Indictments describe a hierarchy of individuals, with Camacho at the top, involved in conspiracies to direct the movement of drug money in the United States to conceal the nature, source, and ownership of the money. Camacho’s co-defendants allegedly gathered cash from the sale of drugs, directed the movement of cash, acted as money couriers or controlled bank accounts through which the drug money was moved. The Superseding Indictment specifically identifies approximately \$1.6 million that was laundered.

In September 2002, Camacho was indicted in the District of New Jersey along with 34 other members of his organization and charged with conspiracy to launder money and multiple substantive money laundering counts. To date, 24 members of Camacho’s organization have been arrested, six of these defendants were extradited from Colombia. Currently, 20 of the defendants have pleaded guilty, of those 19 have been sentenced.

In August 2005, when the Superseding Indictment was returned, a forfeiture order in the amount of \$35 million was obtained against Camacho. Shortly thereafter, the Colombian government seized 24 properties, in excess of 12,350 acres, belonging to Camacho.

Despite indictment, all defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

On the narcotics charges, Camacho faces a statutory mandatory minimum of 10 years in prison, a statutory maximum of life in prison, and fines of up to \$4 million or twice the amount of profits he gained from his illegal conduct. Camacho also faces up to 20 years in prison and a \$500,000 fine on the money laundering charges.

In determining an actual sentence, the judge to whom the case is assigned would, upon a conviction, consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Fishman credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Kevin B. Cruise in Newark; the IRS Criminal Investigation Division, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge William P. Offord; the New Jersey National Guard Anti-Narcotics Task Force, under the direction of Lieutenant Commander Gerard R. Gagnon; and the DEA, under the direction of DEA Regional Director Jay B. Bergman, Andean Region, and Special Agent in Charge Gerard P. McAleer in Newark, with the investigation leading to the defendants' indictment and arrest.

Fishman also thanked the U.S. Department of Justice Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs for providing assistance in this matter. Additionally, Fishman thanked the Venezuelan agencies Oficina Nacional Anti Drogas (ONA), Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional, (SEBIN), Servicio Administrativo de identificacion migracion y Extranjeria, (SAIME) and the Colombian Departamento Administrativo De Seguridad, (DAS) for their assistance in Camacho's arrest and deportation.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Eric Moran and Ronald Chillemi of the Criminal Division in Newark.

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Defense Attorney: William A. Clay, Miami, Fla.