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**TWO TOP ASSOCIATES OF COLOMBIAN NARCO-TERRORIST  
ORGANIZATION FOUND GUILTY OF CONSPIRING TO  
IMPORT TONS OF COCAINE INTO THE UNITED STATES**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and JOHN P. GILBRIDE, the Special Agent-in-Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's New York Field Division ("DEA"), announced that JUAN JOSE MARTINEZ-VEGA, a/k/a "Chiguiro," and ERMINSO CUEVAS CABRERA, a/k/a "Mincho" - two of the top associates of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or "FARC") - were found guilty yesterday of conspiring to import ton-quantities of cocaine into the United States. The FARC is Colombia's main leftist rebel group and a United States Department of State-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. The guilty verdict returned yesterday follows a seven-week trial before United States District Judge THOMAS F. HOGAN in District of Columbia federal court.

According to the Indictment and evidence presented at trial:

The FARC, which occupies large swaths of territory in Colombia, is a hierarchical organization which, at its height during the time of the conspiracy, was comprised of 12,000 to 18,000 members. At the lowest level, the FARC is made up of 77 distinct military units, called Fronts, organized by geographical location. These in turn are grouped into seven "blocs." The FARC is led by a seven-member Secretariat and a 27-member Central General Staff, or Estado Mayor, responsible for setting the cocaine policies of the FARC. The FARC is responsible for the production of more than half the world's supply of cocaine and nearly two-thirds of the cocaine imported into the United States, and is the world's leading cocaine manufacturer. The FARC initially involved itself in the cocaine and cocaine paste trade

by imposing a "tax" on individuals involved in every stage of cocaine production. Later, in the 1990s, recognizing the profit potential, FARC leadership ordered that the FARC become the exclusive buyer of the raw cocaine paste used to make cocaine in all areas under FARC occupation.

In the late 1990s, the FARC leadership met and voted unanimously in favor of a number of resolutions, including resolutions to: expand coca production in areas of Colombia under FARC control; expand the FARC's international distribution routes; increase the number of crystallization labs in which cocaine paste would be converted into cocaine; appoint members within each Front to be in charge of coca production; raise prices that the FARC would pay to campesinos (peasant farmers) from whom they purchased cocaine paste; and mandate that better chemicals be used to increase the quality of cocaine paste.

MARTINEZ-VEGA worked as the FARC's chief associate in its 16th Front, exchanging massive quantities of cocaine for tons of weapons, explosives, ammunition and other logistical supplies. In that capacity, MARTINEZ-VEGA coordinated a network of arms suppliers and cocaine traffickers throughout Colombia and neighboring countries.

CUEVAS CABRERA, the brother of FARC Southern Bloc commander FABIAN RAMIREZ, worked as the chief of cocaine manufacturing for the FARC's 14th Front. In that capacity, CUEVAS CABRERA directed the weekly production of thousands of pounds of cocaine at hidden jungle laboratories controlled by the FARC and coordinated the sale and transportation of this cocaine.

The evidence at trial showed that MARTINEZ-VEGA participated in acts of violence, including the murder of a cocaine-laboratory operator, in furtherance of the cocaine-trafficking conspiracy. The evidence further proved that both MARTINEZ-VEGA and CUEVAS CABRERA conspired with others to manufacture and distribute thousands of tons of cocaine in Colombia, with the knowledge and intent that such cocaine would be imported into the United States.

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CUEVAS CABRERA was extradited from Colombia to the United States in December 2007; MARTINEZ-VEGA was extradited from Colombia to the United States in April 2008. The jury found MARTINEZ-VEGA and CUEVAS CABRERA guilty of one count of conspiring to import cocaine into the United States and conspiring to distribute cocaine with the knowledge and intent

that it would be imported into the United States.

The offense for which MARTINEZ-VEGA and CUEVAS CABRERA were found guilty carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years and a maximum sentence of life in prison. As part of its extradition requests, however, the United States has previously provided assurances to the government of Colombia that it will not seek a life sentence for the defendants, but instead will ask for a prison term of years. MARTINEZ-VEGA, 49, and CUEVAS CABRERA, 51, are scheduled to be sentenced on July 21, 2010, in District of Columbia federal court.

U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA stated: "Yesterday afternoon, a jury brought to justice Juan Jose Martinez-Vega and Erminso Cuevas Cabrera, two top associates of the FARC, whose criminal activities threatened the national security of both Colombia and the United States. The guilty verdicts against Martinez-Vega and Cuevas Cabrera strike significant blows against the FARC's cocaine-trafficking operations and further disrupt the primary source of income of an incredibly dangerous foreign terrorist organization. We will continue to work with our friends at the DEA, along with our other local, federal, and international law enforcement partners, to combat narco-terrorism here and around the world."

DEA Special Agent-in-Charge JOHN P. GILBRIDE stated: "This investigation yielded the successful conviction of two members of a violent narco-terrorist organization known as the FARC. These convictions represent that DEA, our law enforcement partners and our communities will not tolerate or condone the illegal acts of Juan Jose Martinez-Vega and Erminso Cuevas Cabrera and their criminal enterprise."

The investigation resulting in these charges was led by the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, working with the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force (which is comprised of agents and officers of the DEA, the New York City Police Department, the United States Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the New York State Police) and the DEA's Bogota, Colombia, Country Office. The investigation, conducted under the auspices of the Department of Justice's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force Program, involved unprecedented cooperation from the Colombian Military, the Colombian National Police, and the Colombian Fiscalia. Mr. BHARARA praised all the law enforcement partners involved in the investigation, and thanked the United

States Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs, as well as Department of Justice Attachés in Bogota, for their assistance in the extradition process.

This case is being prosecuted in the District of Columbia by the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. Special Assistant United States Attorneys ERIC SNYDER, PABLO QUIÑONES, and RANDALL JACKSON from the Office's new Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit are in charge of the prosecution.

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