



*United States Attorney
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TOP ASSOCIATE AND WEAPONS SUPPLIER OF THE FARC
SENTENCED TO 330 MONTHS IN PRISON
FOR 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," a top associate and weapons supplier of the narco-terrorist organization Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or "FARC") was sentenced today to 330 months in prison for conspiring to import ton-quantities of cocaine into the United States. The sentence was imposed by U.S. District Judge THOMAS F. HOGAN in District of Columbia federal court.

According to the Indictment and evidence presented at trial:

The FARC is a Colombian narco-terrorist group and a U.S. State Department-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. The FARC, which occupies large areas 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. The Fronts 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 the world's leading cocaine manufacturer, and 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. 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.

In late 2001 or early 2002, the FARC leadership met and further resolved, among other things, to: increase cocaine trafficking routes overseas, including to the United States; establish better ways to exchange cocaine and cocaine paste for weapons; and to pay more to campesinos for cocaine paste.

On behalf of the FARC, MARTINEZ VEGA coordinated the exchange of massive quantities of cocaine for tons of weapons, explosives, ammunition and other logistical supplies. A high-level associate of the FARC's 16th Front, MARTINEZ VEGA coordinated a network of arms suppliers and cocaine traffickers throughout Colombia and neighboring countries to facilitate his sales of cocaine and purchases of weapons.

MARTINEZ VEGA was extradited to the United States on April 21, 2008. On April 13, 2010, after a two-month trial, a jury found MARTINEZ VEGA, a/k/a "Chiguiro," and his co-defendant ERMINO CUEVAS CABRERA, a/k/a "Mincho," guilty of one count of conspiring to import cocaine into the United States and one count of conspiring to distribute cocaine with the knowledge and intent that it would be imported into the United States.

The evidence at trial established that from approximately 1998 through 2004, MARTINEZ VEGA conspired with others to distribute tons of cocaine in Colombia, which he knew and intended would be imported into the United States. In exchange for the ton-quantities of cocaine that he distributed, MARTINEZ VEGA provided over 250 tons of weapons and ammunition that he supplied to the FARC. MARTINEZ VEGA worked directly

with, among others, former 16th Front Commander TOMAS MOLINA CARACAS, a/k/a "Negro Acasio" in trafficking weapons and cocaine for the Eastern Bloc of the FARC. The evidence also showed that MARTINEZ VEGA participated in acts of violence with the FARC, including the murder of a cocaine-laboratory operator, in furtherance of the cocaine-trafficking conspiracy.

The investigation resulting in these charges was led by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, working with the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force (which consists of agents and officers of the DEA, the New York City Police Department, the United States Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforce Office of Homeland Security Investigations, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the New York State Police), the DEA's Bogotá, Colombia, Country Office, and the Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Section of the Department of Justice's Criminal Division. 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 government.

Mr. BHARARA praised all the law enforcement partners involved in the investigation, and thanked the Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs, as well as the Criminal Division's Judicial attachés in Bogotá for their involvement in the extradition process.

This case is being prosecuted in the District of Columbia by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. Assistant U.S. Attorneys PABLO QUIÑONES and RANDALL JACKSON of the Office's Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit are in charge of the prosecution.

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