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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JUNE 8, 2010

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**MANHATTAN U.S. ATTORNEY CHARGES SIXTEEN MEMBERS OF
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME GROUP WITH KIDNAPPING,
NARCOTICS, ROBBERY, AND FIREARMS CRIMES**

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, GEORGE VENIZELOS, the Acting Assistant Director-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation ("FBI"), and RAYMOND W. KELLY, the Police Commissioner of the City of New York, announced the unsealing today of two Indictments charging 16 defendants with various counts of kidnapping in aid of a racketeering enterprise, narcotics trafficking, robbery, and firearms possession.

BRUNO KRASNIQI, SAIMIR KRASNIQI, ELTON SEJDARIS, ERKLIANT SULA, SKENDER CAKONI, a/k/a "Neri," GJOVALIN BERISHA, a/k/a "Cuz," NAZIH NASSER, a/k/a "Naz," PLAURENT CELA, and GENTIAN NIKOLLI, a/k/a "Genti," were arrested this morning at their respective homes in New York City by members of the Joint Organized Crime Task Force, which includes agents of the FBI and detectives of the New York City Police Department ("NYPD"). SHKELZEN BALIDEMAJ was arrested this morning in his home in Branford, Connecticut. GENTIAN CARA, MARJAN TAMALI, and JOANNA PAKULSKI, each residents of Canada, were arrested this morning by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police based on requests for their provisional arrest in connection with the Indictments. Three defendants remain at large.

The defendants arrested in New York City and Branford, Connecticut, are expected to appear in federal court in Manhattan this afternoon.

As alleged in the Indictments unsealed today in Manhattan federal court:

BRUNO KRASNIQI, SAIMIR KRASNIQI, ELTON SEJDARIS, and others participated in a racketeering enterprise (hereinafter, the "Krasniqi Organization") that was engaged in kidnapping, narcotics trafficking, extortion, robbery, and the interstate

transportation of stolen goods. The Krasniqi Organization was led by brothers BRUNO KRASNIQI and SAIMIR KRASNIQI, and operated in New York, Michigan, and Connecticut, among other locations. The Krasniqi Organization sought to enrich its members through various criminal schemes, including the trafficking of marijuana, and used firearms and threats of violence to protect its power and territory, as well as to instill fear among rival drug dealers and victims.

In total, the Krasniqi Organization and their co-conspirators -- specifically, BRUNO KRASNIQI, SAIMIR KRASNIQI, ERKLIANT SULA, SKENDER CAKONI, GJOVALIN BERISHA, NAZIH NASSER, GENTIAN NIKOLLI, SHKELZEN BALIDEMAJ, PLAURENT CELA, GENTIAN CARA, MARJAN TAMALI, and JOANNA PAKULSKI -- are charged with having trafficked and distributed more than 100 kilograms of marijuana, from 2003 through 2007.

In addition to narcotics trafficking, members of the Krasniqi Organization engaged in robberies and kidnappings. Specifically, in or about June 2005, after obtaining a multi-kilogram load of marijuana from one of the Krasniqi Organization's marijuana suppliers ("CC-1") and PLAURENT CELA, BRUNO KRASNIQI, SAIMIR KRASNIQI, ELTON SEJDARIS, and other members of the Krasniqi Organization used guns and threats of violence to rob CC-1 and CELA of the marijuana and the marijuana proceeds. Subsequently, BRUNO KRASNIQI, SAIMIR KRASNIQI, and ELTON SEJDARIS, along with other co-conspirators, kidnapped another rival drug dealer at gunpoint.

In addition to these charges, other members of the narcotics conspiracy -- including PLAURENT CELA and SKENDER CAKONI -- are charged with firearms offenses. Specifically, after members of the Krasniqi Organization robbed CC-1 and CELA of marijuana and the proceeds of marijuana trafficking, CELA, CAKONI, and others obtained firearms to protect their narcotics business and attempted to violently retaliate for the robbery of narcotics by members of the Krasniqi Organization.

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The attached table summarizes the charges and potential penalties in the Indictments.

The case is assigned to United States District Judge RICHARD J. HOLWELL. The initial conference before Judge HOLWELL is scheduled for June 15, 2010, at 12:00 p.m.

Mr. BHARARA praised the outstanding work of the FBI and NYPD in the Joint Organized Crime Task Force in the investigation. He added that the investigation is continuing. In addition, Mr. BHARARA expressed his gratitude to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for their cooperation in the investigation.

U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA said: "Led by brothers Bruno and Saimir Krasniqi, this international organized crime group allegedly engaged in kidnapping, robbery, narcotics trafficking and acts violence to fund and protect its operations. This investigation, which has spanned multiple states and two neighboring countries, demonstrates the ongoing commitment of the Southern District of New York and the Joint Organized Crime Task Force to pursue the ever-present threat posed by international organized crime operating within our borders and on our streets."

FBI Acting Assistant Director-in-Charge GEORGE VENIZELOS said: "The alleged charges from today's arrests include robbery, firearms possession, narcotics trafficking, and kidnapping. These indictments highlight problems that not only impact the citizens of New York City. The crimes committed have a major effect on criminal organizations and public safety worldwide. As witnessed today, cooperation between dedicated groups of law enforcement partners is, and will continue to be, a critical factor for successfully defending threats that endanger our societies and citizens, both at home and abroad."

New York City Police Commissioner RAYMOND W. KELLY said: "The nexus between violence and marijuana trafficking was never clearer than in this case, where rivals reverted to kidnapping and intimidation to control the market."

The prosecution is being handled by the Office's Organized Crime Unit. Assistant United States Attorney AVI WEITZMAN is in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Indictments are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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Defendant	Age	Residence
BRUNO KRASNIQI	26	Staten Island, New York
SAIMIR KRASNIQI	29	Staten Island, New York
ELTON SEJDARIS	26	Staten Island, New York
ERKLIANT SULA	25	Staten Island, New York
SKENDER CAKONI	44	Queens, New York
GJOVALIN BERISHA	30	Bronx, New York
NAZIH NASSER	35	Queens, New York
GENTIAN NIKOLLI	33	Queens, New York
SHKELZEN BALIDEMAJ	39	Branford, Connecticut
PLAURENT CELA	29	Brooklyn, New York
GENTIAN CARA	37	Toronto, Canada
MARJAN TAMALI	35	Toronto, Canada
JOANNA PAKULSKI	36	Toronto, Canada

Ct	Charge	Defendant	Maximum Penalty
1	Kidnapping in Aid of a Racketeering Enterprise	BRUNO KRASNIQI SAIMIR KRASNIQI ELTON SEJDARIS	life imprisonment; 5 years' supervised release; \$250,000 or twice the amount of criminal proceeds
2	Use And Carrying Of A Firearm	BRUNO KRASNIQI SAIMIR KRASNIQI ELTON SEJDARIS	life imprisonment with 7 years to run consecutively with any other imprisonment; 5 years' supervised release; \$250,000 or twice the amount of criminal proceeds

Ct	Charge	Defendant	Maximum Penalty
3	Narcotics Conspiracy	BRUNO KRASNIQI SAIMIR KRASNIQI ERKLIANT SULA SHKELZEN BALIDEMAJ PLAURENT CELA SKENDER CAKONI GENTIAN CARA MARJAN TAMALI GJOVALIN BERISHA NAZIH NASSER GENTIAN NIKOLLI JOANNA PAKULSKI	40 years' imprisonment with a mandatory minimum term of 5 years; \$2,000,000 fine or twice gross gain/loss from the offense; mandatory min 4 years' supervised release with a maximum term of life supervised release
4	Use And Carrying Of A Firearm	BRUNO KRASNIQI SAIMIR KRASNIQI ELTON SEJDARIS	life imprisonment with 7 years to run consecutively with any other imprisonment, or 25 years to run consecutively if it's a second firearms conviction; 5 years' supervised release; \$250,000 or twice the amount of criminal proceeds
5	Hobbs Act Robbery Conspiracy	BRUNO KRASNIQI SAIMIR KRASNIQI ELTON SEJDARIS	20 yrs. in prison; 3 yrs. supervised release; \$250,000 fine or twice the gain or loss from the offense
6	Use And Carrying Of A Firearm	PLAURENT CELA SKENDER CAKONI	life imprisonment with 5 years to run consecutively with any other imprisonment; 5 years' supervised release; \$250,000 fine