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**MANHATTAN U.S. ATTORNEY CHARGES NINE MEMBERS
OF BRONX-BASED HEROIN DISTRIBUTION RING**

***"Operation Skeleton Army" Targeted Bronx-Based Crew Selling
Heroin Branded "Showtime," "Bulgari," and "Ain't I."***

PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, JOHN P. GILBRIDE, the Special-Agent-in-Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's New York Field Division ("DEA"), RAYMOND W. KELLY, the Police Commissioner of the City of New York ("NYPD"), and JAMES T. HAYES, JR., the Special-Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Office of Homeland Security Investigations ("HSI") in New York, announced the unsealing of a Complaint charging nine members of a criminal organization based in the Bronx with conspiracy to distribute heroin. As the culmination of "Operation Skeleton Army," law enforcement officers arrested six defendants in the Bronx, and one defendant in Westchester county.

The following seven of the nine defendants were arrested earlier today: JULIO LLERANDEZ, a/k/a "Pito," a/k/a "Pete," ERIC RUIZ, a/k/a "Rick," a/k/a "E," LESTER COOPER, DANNY

YANCE, CARLOS VARGAS, a/k/a "Cooper," JOSE MORALES, a/k/a "Joe," a/k/a "Shnukie," and MARK SERRANO. JAMES TOBAR, a/k/a "Trice," is expected to surrender to authorities later today. MATTHEW GREEN, a/k/a "Ashy," remains at large. The defendants are expected to be presented in Manhattan federal court later today.

According to the Complaint and other documents filed in Manhattan federal court:

Between September 2009 and August 2010, a heroin distribution ring led by LLERANDEZ and RUIZ dispensed significant quantities of heroin in the Bronx. LLERANDEZ, RUIZ, and others distributed the drugs through meetings in apartment buildings and parking lots. For example, on two separate occasions, a confidential informant working with DEA officials purchased distribution quantities, or bundles, of heroin from LLERANDEZ in an apartment building.

LLERANDEZ received heroin from various suppliers including RUIZ, YANCE, TOBAR, VARGAS, and MORALES. LLERANDEZ distributed heroin through orders placed by COOPER, GREEN, and SERRANO. LLERANDEZ also directly filled orders placed by customers. Various telephone conversations, during which defendants specified the amount of drugs, the price of the drugs, and the place and time to do the drug deals, were recorded by law enforcement authorities.

Earlier today, law enforcement officers executed court-authorized search warrants at two locations in the Bronx at which certain defendants stored and/or distributed heroin or stored the proceeds of this illegal activity. During these searches, officers recovered, among other evidence, approximately half a kilogram of heroin.

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Mr. BHARARA praised the investigative work of the DEA, NYPD, HSI, and the New York Field Division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives ("ATF"). He added that the investigation is ongoing.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA stated: "Today's arrests should remind New York City of federal, state, and local law enforcement's collective commitment to clean our communities of dangerous narcotics. We will continue to work with our partners at the DEA, NYPD, HSI, and ATF to stop the illegal distribution of narcotics."

DEA Special-Agent-in-Charge JOHN P. GILBRIDE stated: "This operation identified a heroin distribution organization that was preying on our communities. 'Operation Skeleton Army' uncovered a drug organization selling heroin throughout the streets of New York. Federal, local, and state law enforcement combined efforts in order to arrest those responsible for the distribution and those responsible for making profit off the sale of poison." Special-Agent-in-Charge GILBRIDE would like to thank the Southern District of New York U.S. Attorney's Office, HSI, ATF, and NYPD for their diligent work in this investigation.

NYPD Commissioner RAYMOND W. KELLY said: "The individuals arrested today were responsible for pushing heroin onto neighborhood streets in the Bronx. I want to commend the NYPD detectives and federal agents for their work investigating and apprehending this drug dealing crew."

HSI Special-Agent-in-Charge JAMES T. HAYES, JR. said: "By pooling our expertise and resources, we have dismantled another group that has been importing and selling heroin throughout New York City. Dangerous and highly addictive drugs like heroin perpetuate crime and violence in our communities. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to address this threat."

This case is being handled by the Office's Narcotics Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys JENNIFER E. BURNS, RACHEL P. KOVNER, and KAN NAWADAY are in charge of the prosecution.

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

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