



NEWS RELEASE

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Thomas P. O'Brien

United States Attorney
Central District of California

Thom Mrozek, Public Affairs Officer
(213) 894-6947
thom.mrozek@usdoj.gov
www.usdoj.gov/usao/cac

LANCASTER MAN SENTENCED TO 42 MONTHS IN PRISON FOR TRAFFICKING CONTRABAND CIGARETTES

A Lancaster man who trafficked counterfeit cigarettes and cigarettes bearing counterfeit California tax stamps has been sentenced to 42 months in Federal prison and ordered to pay restitution to the State of California in the amount of \$908,271.

Daniel Bekele Araya, 43, of Lancaster, was sentenced late yesterday by United States District Judge Stephen G. Larson in Riverside. Araya pled guilty last July to trafficking contraband cigarettes and smuggling goods into the United States.

The State of California imposes a tax of 87 cents per pack on all cigarettes distributed within the state. State law requires that each pack of cigarettes contain a tax stamp affixed to the bottom of the pack as proof that the state cigarette tax has been paid.

Between August 2002 and about January 2005, Araya distributed more than 1 million packs of cigarettes that bore counterfeit tax stamps. Some of these cigarettes were counterfeit cigarettes that had been unlawfully smuggled into the United States from China. The total tax loss to California as a result of Araya's conduct was approximately \$908,271.

Araya's conviction was the result of a nearly three-year investigation of contraband cigarette trafficking and smuggling of counterfeit goods into the United States by numerous individuals and businesses. The targets of the investigation evaded the California tax by affixing counterfeit tax stamps onto packs of cigarettes which were then sold at smoke shops and other retail locations throughout Southern

California. Some of the targets also smuggled counterfeit Marlboro and Newport brand cigarettes into the United States from China. In addition to Araya, twelve other persons have been convicted as a result of this investigation.

- Ali Salem Abdelhadi, of Hesperia, pled guilty to conspiracy and trafficking contraband cigarettes and was sentenced to 33 months in Federal prison and was ordered to pay restitution to California in the amount of \$1,484,785.
- Ghaleb Salem Almasad, of Hesperia, pled guilty to conspiracy and trafficking contraband cigarettes and was sentenced to 24 months in Federal prison and was ordered to pay restitution to California in the amount of \$1,484,785.
- Ahmad Salem Almasad, of Hesperia, pled guilty to conspiracy and trafficking contraband cigarettes and was sentenced to 27 months in Federal prison and was ordered to pay restitution to California in the amount of \$1,484,785.
- Samir Jamil Jaber, of Corona, pled guilty to conspiracy and trafficking contraband cigarettes and was sentenced to 24 months in Federal prison and was ordered to pay restitution to California in the amount of \$1,484,785.
- Adel Muhammed Shahin, of Rancho Cucamonga, pled guilty to conspiracy and smuggling goods into the United States and was sentenced to 21 months in Federal prison and was ordered to pay restitution to California in the amount of \$400,836.
- Adnan Bawaneh, of Victorville, pled guilty to conspiracy and trafficking contraband cigarettes and was sentenced to three-years probation and was ordered to pay restitution to California in the amount of \$400,836.
- Ritesh Arvindbhai Patel, of Cerritos, pled guilty to conspiracy and trafficking contraband cigarettes and was sentenced to 8 months in Federal prison and was ordered to pay restitution to California in the amount of \$250,299.

- Jayesh Kumar RaichandbhaiThakkar absconded after pleading guilty to conspiracy and trafficking contraband cigarettes and remains a fugitive.
- Rabi Ayash, of Sylmar, pled guilty to trafficking contraband cigarettes and was sentenced to three-years probation and was ordered to pay restitution to California in the amount of \$37,776.
- Sivly Hang, of Moreno Valley, pled guilty to trafficking contraband cigarettes and smuggling goods into the United States and was sentenced to two-years probation and was ordered to pay restitution to California in the amount of \$14,920.
- Lisa Montoya, of Las Vegas, pled guilty to trafficking contraband cigarettes and was sentenced to three-years probation and was ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$23,000.
- Bart Montoya, of Las Vegas, pled guilty to a misdemeanor and was sentenced to 12 months probation and was ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$23,000.

This investigation was conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, with assistance from the California Board of Equalization, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, and Internal Revenue Service.

Contact: AUSA Jerry Behnke - (951)276-6211