



# Department of Justice

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District of Rhode Island

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Thursday, December 5, 2013  
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## **Twenty-four Individuals Imprisoned, Twelve Others Face Deportation in Sweeping Investigation Targeting Armed Drug Dealers and Gang Members**

***“Operation Gas” takes 15 Firearms and over 23 Kilograms of Heroin off the Streets of Providence; Dismantles MS-13 Street Gang***

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – A sweeping, more than two-year investigation into the trafficking of heroin by armed drug dealers in Providence and surrounding areas has resulted in the imprisonment of twenty-four individuals, the arrest and detention of twelve others who face deportation on alleged immigration violations, and the dismantling of the MS-13 Providence street gang.

The investigation, dubbed “*Operation Gas*,” was conducted by a task force comprised of federal agents from the FBI, DEA, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and Homeland Security Investigations, detectives and officers from the Rhode Island State Police, Providence Police, Cranston Police, Newport Police, Pawtucket Police and Woonsocket Police Departments, and prosecutors from the United States Attorney’s Office and the Rhode Island Department of Attorney General.

The investigation targeted the trafficking of heroin from the Dominican Republic and Guatemala to Rhode Island, and the distribution of that heroin by armed drug dealers in Providence and surrounding areas. The investigation led to the seizure of more than twenty-three kilograms of heroin, including the largest single seizure in Rhode Island, as well as the seizure of over 100 grams of cocaine, fifteen firearms, more than \$400,000 in cash, and twelve vehicles. The drug trafficking investigation led to a subsequent investigation that targeted leaders, members and associates of the MS-13 Providence street gang who were involved in gang-on-gang violence, firearms sales and drug distribution.

The subsequent prosecution of those involved resulted in the conviction and imprisonment of twenty-four individuals, including the leaders and known members of the MS-13 Providence street gang, on drugs, firearms, assault and arson charges, and of a convicted heroin trafficker who attempted to hire a person to murder his girlfriend.

In addition, twelve individuals identified as members and associates of the MS-13 Providence street gang and the SUR-13 street gang were detained by Homeland Security Investigations on alleged immigration violations. Many of the individuals have already been deported.

“Armed gang activity, and associated drug dealing, continues to plague Providence and other urban neighborhoods across our state,” said United States Attorney Peter F. Neronha. “History has taught us only too well: gangs and drug dealing inevitably lead to gun violence. To effectively combat this violence, we must continue to do more than simply wait for the shooting to stop and assess the carnage. Only a proactive approach, targeting the worst of the worst and bringing them to justice *before* the shooting starts, can lead to a safer Rhode Island.”

“This is an example where another team challenged ours and lost,” said Vincent Lisi, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI’s Boston Division which is responsible for Rhode Island. “Gang members who want to fill the vacuum left by these arrests should know the Safe Streets Task force will always win over those who chose a life of crime by holding responsible those who put illegal guns on our streets, deal heroin in our neighborhoods and commit other crimes in our cities.”

"DEA is committed to the dismantling of criminal organizations that bring drugs and violence into our neighborhoods", said John J. Arvanitis, Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration’s New England Field Division. "Our commitment is unwavering and together with our federal, state and local law enforcement partners we will continue to target violent drug trafficking organizations operating throughout our communities."

“Cooperation among local, state and federal law enforcement agencies and prosecutors led to the successful disruption of the MS-13 gang in Providence. Targeting criminal activity by gangs and gang members before violence erupts is critical in bringing greater security to our urban communities,” said Attorney General Peter Kilmartin.

“As I have stated in the past, investigations like this are a message as to how we leverage our partnerships and combine our efforts to dismantle organized gang and drug activity. Operations like this are what makes the community safer and also sends a strong message to those involved in the gun, gang, and drug trade,” said Colonel Hugh Clements.

Among the defendants arrested, convicted and imprisoned as a result of “*Operation Gas*”

- **Jose Victor Fernandez, 47, Providence**  
Jose Fernandez was arrested in April 20, 2011, following a lengthy investigation into his suspected heroin trafficking activities. In addition to numerous undercover purchases of heroin, law enforcement seized two kilograms of heroin discovered concealed inside car parts shipped from Guatemala to an auto dealership where Fernandez worked. During the investigation into Fernandez’s drug trafficking activities, law enforcement learned that Fernandez was attempting to hire a person to murder his girlfriend. Fernandez was convicted in federal court of attempted murder for hire as well as multiple heroin distribution charges. Fernandez is serving a sentence of 97 months in federal prison.
- **Jose Dume, Jr., 29, Providence**  
**Ariel Hassel, aka Miguel Angel Colon, 33, Cranston**

In the Fall of 2011, the FBI and DEA began investigating a Dominican drug trafficking organization that distributed heroin, and on occasion cocaine, to customers in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. According to information presented to the court, Jose Dume, Jr., was identified by law enforcement as the leader of this conspiracy. The investigation revealed that Dume purchased kilogram quantities of heroin from Ariel Hassel. It is estimated that over the course of the conspiracy, Dume purchased approximately 3 kilos of heroin, often in 500 to 600 gram increments, which he then sold to various customers throughout Rhode Island.

During the course of the investigation into Dume and Hassel’s drug trafficking and firearm trafficking activities, which included undercover drug and firearms purchases, the use of electronic monitoring and surveillance equipment, and the execution of court authorized search warrants and wiretaps, law enforcement seized four firearms, about 2.5 kilograms of heroin, over \$400,000 in cash, jewelry valued at more than \$60,000 and twelve vehicles from residences in Providence, Cranston, and West Warwick. The wiretap investigation led to the arrest and conviction of 14 individuals including Dume, Hassel, their partners and drug runners, as well as customers. Among those arrested was Vlady Tejada, a fugitive on federal drug charges out of the District of Massachusetts.

Dume and Hassel were arrested by federal agents on May 11, 2012. Dume pleaded guilty in October 2013, to federal conspiracy, heroin trafficking and firearm charges. He was sentenced on October 21, 2013, to 15 years in federal prison. Hassel pleaded guilty in July 2013 to heroin and cocaine trafficking charges. He was sentenced in July 2013 to 90 months in federal prison.

- **Jorge Daniel Estrada, 19, Providence**

- **Angel Feliz, 48, Dorchester, Mass.**

In October 2012, the DEA arrested Jorge Daniel Estrada and Angel Feliz on charges of conspiracy to distribute 17 kilograms of heroin. In addition to seizing 17 kilos of heroin, police seized three vehicles. The arrests of Jose Fernandez, Jorge Estrada and Angel Feliz, prompted by information developed by Providence Police detectives, resulted in the seizure of a total of 19 kilograms of heroin valued at \$4.5 million dollars, the largest single seizure of heroin in Rhode Island. Estrada and Feliz have been sentenced to 180 and 70 months in federal prison respectively.

- **Francisco Bonilla, a/k/a "Cisco," 35, Providence**

In October 2012, Francisco Bonilla, the alleged leader of the MS-13 Providence street gang, was indicted by a Rhode Island state court grand jury on assault and weapons charges. He pleaded guilty in January 2013, and is currently serving a 10-year prison sentence at the ACI. Bonilla, a citizen of El Salvador, will face deportation proceedings upon completion of his prison term.

- **Richard Ibenez, a/k/a "Chinoz", 23, Providence**

In October 2012, Richard Ibenez, a member of the MS-13 Providence street gang, was indicted by a Rhode Island state court grand jury on conspiracy and arson charges. He pleaded guilty in January 2013, and is currently serving an 8 year prison sentence at the ACI.

Defendants charged in the U.S. District Court were prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Adi Goldstein, Paul F. Daly, Jr., Sandra R. Hebert, Milind M. Shah, and First Assistant U.S. Attorney Kenneth P. Madden. Defendants charged in Rhode Island state court were prosecuted by Assistant Attorney General James Baum.

## OPERATION GAS DEFENDANTS

**Wayne Barnes**, 53, Providence

Drug and firearms charges

3 years in federal prison to be followed by 5 years of supervised release

**Francisco A. Bonilla a/k/a Cisco**, 35, Prov.

*MS-13 gang leader*

Assault & firearms charges

20 years, 10 years to serve at ACI

10 years suspended w/probation

**Miguel Colon a/k/a Ariel Hassel**, 33, Cranston

Heroin and cocaine trafficking charges

90 months in federal prison to be followed by 5 years supervised release

Faces deportation proceedings

**Juan Cotto**, 45, Providence

Conspiracy

24 months in federal prison to be followed by 5 years supervised release

**Jose Dume, Jr.**, 39, Providence

*Leader of heroin trafficking conspiracy*

Heroin trafficking and firearm charges

15 years in federal prison to be followed by 5 years supervised release

Faces deportation proceedings

**Angel Feliz**, 48, Dorchester, Mass.

Heroin trafficking charges

70 months in federal prison to be followed by 3 years supervised release

**Christian Ferrer**, 28, Providence

*Drug source for MS-13 gang*

Conspiracy and cocaine trafficking charges

71 months in federal prison to be followed by 5 years supervised release

**Cristian Jimenez**, 34, Providence

Convicted at trial in June 2013 on charges of trafficking heroin

Detained

**Angel Maria Marte**, 49, Providence

Heroin trafficking charges

80 months in federal prison to be followed by 5 years supervised release

Faces deportation proceedings

**Estevan Benzan**, 29, Providence

Heroin Trafficking

70 months in federal prison to be followed by 5 years supervised release

Faces deportation proceedings

**Janet Cobian**, 24, Taunton, Mass.

Heroin possession & distribution charges

5 years probation

**Louis Cortez a/k/a Cholo**, 37, Providence

*SUR-13 gang member*

Firearm possession

Six months confinement to be followed by 5 years supervised release

**Alejandro Delacruz a/k/a Alex**, 28, Providence

*C-Block gang member*

Conspiracy and firearm charges

51 months in federal prison to be followed by 3 years supervised release

**Jorge Daniel Estrada**, 19, Guatemala

Conspiracy and heroin trafficking charges

15 years in federal prison followed by lifetime supervised release.

Immigration detainer lodged

**Jose "Victor" Fernandez**, 47, Providence

Heroin trafficking and murder for hire charges

97 months in federal prison to be followed by 5 years of supervised release

**Richard Ibanez a/k/a Chinoz**, 23, Providence

*MS-13 gang member*

Conspiracy and arson charges

20 years, 8 years to serve at ACI

12 years suspended w/probation

**Michael Linaris**, 36, Providence

Firearm charge

24 months in federal prison to be followed by 3 years supervised release

**Yelkis Martinez**, 36, Providence

Maintaining a drug involved premises and fraud charges

30 months in federal prison followed by 3 years supervised release

Faces deportation proceedings

## OPERATION GAS DEFENDANTS

**Geovannie Nieves**, 28, West Warwick  
Heroin trafficking charges  
90 months in federal prison followed by 5 years  
supervised release  
Faces deportation proceedings

**Adalberto Pagan a/k/a Bebo**, 28, Providence  
*Firearm source for MS-13*  
Firearm charges  
37 months in federal prison followed by 3 years  
supervised release

**Vlady Tejada**, 33, Boston, Mass.  
Heroin and cocaine trafficking charges  
71 months in federal prison to be followed by 4 years  
supervised release  
Faces deportation proceedings

**Leopoldo Nunez**, 26, Providence  
Firearms charges  
60 months in federal prison to be followed by 3 years  
of supervised release

**Alexander Ramos**, 42, Providence  
Cocaine conspiracy and distribution  
70 months in federal prison followed by 5 years  
supervised release

**Dewrys Marte Valerio**, 28, Providence  
Heroin and cocaine trafficking charges  
80 months in federal prison followed by 5 years  
supervised release

*The following defendants were detained by Homeland Security Investigations on alleged immigration violations. Several of the defendants have been deported.*

**Carlos Esau Arreaga Lopez a/k/a Duende**, 27, Guatemala  
*MS-13 gang member*

**Orlando Ramon Gonzalez Lopez a/k/a Pikachu** 33, Mexico  
*MS-13 gang member*

**Fari Armando Nava Tlapale a/k/a Fatty**, 21, Mexico  
*MS-13 gang member*

**Alberto Ozuna Ramirez a/k/a Pepo**, 23, Mexico  
*MS-13 gang member*

**Jose Leonida Villalobos Rodriguez a/k/a Jumbo**, 27, El Salvador  
*MS-13 gang member*

**Victor Hugo Amaro**, 30, Mexico  
*MS-13 gang associate*

**Arturo Cruz a/k/a Edison Arturo Cruz Esperanza**, 24, Honduras  
*MS-13 gang member*

**Fredy Saravia**, 37, Guatemala  
*MS-13 gang associate*

**Edgar Coronado a/k/a Chino**, 33, Guatemala  
*MS-13 gang member*

**Luis Salgado a/k/a Pee-Wee**, 22, Mexico  
*SUR-13 gang member*

**Wagner Miranda a/k/a Alex**, 23, Guatemala  
*MS-13 gang member*

**Jose Borjas a/k/a Catracho**, 36, Honduras  
*MS-13 gang associate*

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