



**Office of the
Special Narcotics Prosecutor
for the City of New York**

**Bridget G. Brennan, Special Narcotics
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Press Release

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OPERATION PANAMA EXPRESS

New York City Special Narcotics Prosecutor BRIDGET G. BRENNAN, New York Police Commissioner RAYMOND W. KELLY, New York Dea Special Agent-In-Charge JOHN P. GILBRIDE announced today the arrest of 20 individuals involved in a drug enterprise that used dozens of swallowers to transport heroin from Panama to the United States.

Indictments unsealed today charged Carlos Antonio Zaldivar Robinson, Lee Omar Dean Jerome, Luis Alberto Fruto Lay and Mark Anthony Lowe, four leaders in Panama who oversaw the recruitment of both American and Panamanian swallowers. Bronx-based Silverio Guzman, the head of the New York cell, coordinated the distribution of heroin. Also indicted were a Panamanian and an American citizen who smuggled ingested heroin, three other members of the transportation organization, a Bronx-based heroin supplier, and three local drug traffickers who resold the drugs throughout New York City.

The international investigation, dubbed "Operation Panama Express," identified Silverio Guzman as the main target in New York. Guzman actively recruited swallowers, arranged for the trips under the guidance of the Panamanian bosses, made arrangements to retrieve the heroin from the swallowers and supplied heroin to local dealers. For nine months, surveillance and wiretap operations traced the comings and goings of swallowers, including the two indicted today, as they traveled routinely from Latin America to the United States transporting pellets full of heroin. On September 10, 2005, swallower Daniel Hinestroza was arrested in Panama by Panamanian authorities with the assistance of DEA agents in Panama. Hinestroza, who had swallowed 84 pellets containing over 1½ kilogram of heroin was on his way to New York City. During the investigation, another courier, Juan Castillo, traveled to and from the United States and Venezuela, Costa Rica, Panama, Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, England, Holland and France on approximately 22 different occasions.

Records show the cartel paid an average of \$8,000 for a kilogram of heroin in Panama which re-sold wholesale for more than \$50,000 in New York City, and could potentially have a street value of \$300,000 on the streets of the city. Swallowers were paid a fee plus airfare and hotel

expenses per trip. The fee could go up to as much as \$10,000 depending on how many heroin pellets an individual swallower could transport. During the investigation, agents seized over 3 kilos of heroin in Manhattan, Bronx and Brooklyn. In addition, recovered wire receipts recorded money transfers of over \$300,000 from the United States to Panama.

NYPD detectives and DEA agents began arresting defendants named on the indictments on Wednesday, January 25, 2006, at the same time that Panamanian authorities apprehended targets in Panama including the cartel leaders. The Oficina del Fiscal de Panama will be prosecuting the Panamanian citizens arrested in that country.

New York City Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan said: "This investigation identified all major players in an operation that relied on a professional staff of swallows to smuggle heroin, which eventually found its way to the streets of New York City. Today's indictment is a testament to the perseverance and dedication of NYPD detectives, who found the source of the heroin; DEA and Panamanian agents, traced it across international borders; and prosecutors from my office, who worked on this investigation at every stage."

New York City Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly said: "Heroin remains an enemy of public safety and family stability in New York and everywhere. I want to congratulate the Police Officers and DEA agents for their dedicated and dangerous work. I also want to commend Bridget Brennan for her first-rate public service as Special Narcotics Prosecutor."

John P. Gilbride, Special Agent in Charge stated, "We are committed to stopping the flow of dangerous narcotics into our communities by going straight to the source and putting international drug traffickers out of business. Together with our local and global network of law enforcement partners, we will continue to collaborate our resources against those who would like to harm our society for profit. Today's arrests have taken violent criminals off the streets of New York and Panama and shut down an illegal drug trafficking enterprise that threatened the welfare of our communities."

The joint investigation was conducted by the New York City Police Department's Narcotics Borough Manhattan North Major Case Squad, the Drug Enforcement Administration - New York and Panama field offices, the Panamanian Policia Tecnica Judicial's Sensitive Investigations Unit, (trained by the DEA), the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor and the Office of the Panamanian Prosecutor with the assistance of agents from the Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE), and Customs Border and Protection Office.