



**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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NEW YORK TRAFFICKERS RUN DOMINICAN MURDER RING

From their base in New York, narcotics traffickers directed hit men to commit homicides of four men in the Dominican Republic. Within an 11 day period in February 2008, three were shot to death and two unintended victims were seriously wounded. The orders to assassinate were issued by Rafael Alvares and his drug dealing associates in New York City, and stemmed from Alvares' desire to solidify his ties to Dominican drug dealers and eliminate enemies.

As law enforcement officers working on the case overheard wiretapped conversations about the mayhem occurring in the Dominican Republic, they collaborated with Dominican law enforcement counterparts, managing to arrest Alvares and his crew on narcotics charges on February 21, 2008. The indictment announced today is the result of an investigation into the homicides which would not have been possible without the cooperation of all the agencies represented today and international partners in the Dominican Republic.

Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan announced today the indictment of four New York based drug traffickers in connection with four murders in the Dominican Republic.

The 25-count indictment charges Rafael Alvares, a/k/a Rafi, as the head of a narcotics importation organization, and associates Wander Espinal a/k/a Bori; Danny Joel Rodriguez a/k/a Joel; and Carlos Hilario. In addition to homicide charges, they are charged in a conspiracy to distribute cocaine to customers in the New York area.

Court-ordered wiretapping on the application of District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau on Rafael Alvares' phones began in December of 2007. Piecing together leads from overheard conversations and other sources, investigators learned that Alvares had owned five kilograms of cocaine, which were designated for Ramon De Jesus Santos, a/k/a Morenito, one of his customers. Law enforcement officers seized the kilograms of cocaine on 192nd Street and Broadway in Manhattan on September 20, 2007.

Despite the seizure, Alvares and Rodriguez claimed they were entitled to payment and met with Santos a/k/a Morenito, to seek compensation for the undelivered drugs. In November 2007, to escape the debt, Santos fled to San Francisco De Macoris in the Dominican Republic. From his New York base, Alvares directed associates to assassinate Santos in San Francisco De Macoris.

During a November 25, 2007 attempt to kill Santos, hit men shot Franklin Almonte, whom they mistook for Santos. The gunman fired upon Almonte several times, killing him. Santos was not hurt.

Four other separate shootings ordered by Alvares and his associates resulted in the deaths of three and serious injury to two in the city of Santiago in the Dominican Republic. They occurred during an 11-day period between February 8 and Feb. 19, 2008. The murdered victims include Alexander Vargas Garcia a/k/a/ Alex Pepa, Eddy Gonzalez Jimenez, a/k/a Chiqui, and Francisco Apolinar Reynoso, a/k/a Bobo; all members of Alex Pepa's narcotics group in the Dominican Republic.

On February 8, 2008, both Alex Pepa and Eddy Gonzalez Jimenez were shot and killed at Alvares' direction, because he believed they were a threat to his drug operations, and because he had a personal dispute with them.

On February 13, 2008, an associate of Alvares mistook a male driving a scooter for another member of the Pepa group, and shot him, striking him and a female passenger as they were on their way home from a funeral. On February 19, 2008, on Alvares' orders, two hitmen were dispatched to Francisco Apolinar Reynoso's house in the Nibaje area of Santiago, where one entered his house and shot him to death. Alvares sent money to the Dominican Republic on several occasions to pay for guns and compensate hit men.

The investigation established that Alvares' organization in New York imported kilogram quantities of cocaine for distribution to customers in the New York area. At Alvares' direction, Hilario picked up shipments of cocaine from a supplier at Pelham Parkway and Barnes Avenue in the Bronx, and delivered the narcotics to Espinal in Manhattan. Organization customers were instructed to pick up their cocaine purchases from Espinal.

The final seizure in the investigation occurred on January 29, 2008 when members of the Organized Crime Strike Force recovered four kilograms of cocaine from the back seat of livery cab Hilario was driving. Hilario was arrested at the time.

On February 21, 2008, members of the Strike Force arrested Alvares at home, Rodriguez and Espinal in Manhattan. Alvares, Espinal and Hilario were remanded and \$2 million bail was imposed on Rodriguez who, along with his co-defendants, is in custody in Rikers Island. The investigation into the homicides continued after the arrests on the narcotics charges. A Grand Jury subsequently voted an indictment on narcotics and murder conspiracies. The defendants will be arraigned on the indictment at 2:15 today before Judge Bonnie Wittner in Part 61.

Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan called the operation "one of the most brazen cases of reckless killings for the benefit of narcotics trafficking that we have seen." She added,

"Drug profits and the power that come from them produced an international operation that not only cavalierly killed other drug dealers, but innocent people who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. We are proud of the efforts of our local, state and federal law enforcement partners, and grateful for the international cooperation we received to put this deadly conspiracy out of business."

District Attorney Morgenthau said, "This is a perfect example where the international movement of narcotics has a direct impact on the lives of citizens in affected countries. By combining resources and working jointly with local, federal and foreign law enforcement we are able to prosecute those responsible for these murderous acts. I thank all of the agencies involved."

DEA Special Agent in Charge John P. Gilbride said, "These arrests demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between drug trafficking and violence. Through diligent collaboration between international, state, federal and local law enforcement these individuals have been brought to justice to face their heinous illegal actions".

The investigation was conducted jointly by New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement "Strike Force" (Strike Force) and the Office of the New York City Special Narcotics Prosecutor in cooperation a number of agencies in the Dominican Republic. The Strike Force is comprised of agents and officers of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, the New York City Police

Department, the United States Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division, the Department of Homeland Security United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the New York State Police, the United States Marshals Service, the United States Secret Service and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The Strike Force is partially funded by the New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), which is a federally funded crime fighting initiative. The New York County District Attorney's Office and the Office of the New York City Special Narcotics Prosecutor are prosecuting the case.

The Dominican agencies included the National Institute of Forensic Science, the Dominican Republic National Police, the Public Ministry from San Francisco De Macoris and Santiago, and the Dominican National Drug Control Agency.

Below are the defendants and the charges:

Rafael Alvares a/k/a Rafi, (7/31/1980) Wilmington, DE	Conspiracy 2nd Degree (5 counts) Murder 1st Degree (4 counts) Murder 2nd Degree (4 counts) Attempted Murder 1st Degree (3 counts) Attempted Murder 2nd Degree (3 counts) Assault 1st Degree (2 counts) Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance – 1st Degree (1 count) Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance – 1st Degree (3
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Wander Espinal a/k/a Bori (12/5/1983) 145 St. Nicholas Avenue New York, NY	Conspiracy 2nd Degree (3 counts) Murder 1st Degree (1counts) Murder 2nd Degree (1 counts) Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance – 1st Degree (2 counts)
Danny Joel Rodriguez a/k/a Joel (5/19/1981) 608 Grand Concourse Bronx. NY	Conspiracy 2nd Degree (4 counts) Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance - 1st Degree (1 count) Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance – 1st Degree (1 count)
Carlos Hilario (1/23/82) 562 West 190th Street New York, NY	Conspiracy 2nd Degree (2 counts) Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance – 1st Degree (2 counts)

All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.