



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

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**MANHATTAN U.S. ATTORNEY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT
PARTNERS CHARGE 50 MEMBERS OF MASSIVE MARIJUANA
TRAFFICKING RING**

*ICE HSI Leads Coordinated, Multi-Agency Law Enforcement Strike That Shuts Down
Pipeline For Ton-Quantities Of Marijuana Into New York City*

BRIDGET G. BRENNAN, Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York, joins PREET BHARARA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, JAMES T. HAYES, JR., the Special-Agent-in-Charge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Homeland Security Investigations in New York (ICE HSI), JOHN P. GILBRIDE, the Special-Agent-in-Charge of the New York Division of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), RAYMOND W. KELLY, the Police Commissioner of the City of New York (NYPD), and ROSE GILL HEARN, the Commissioner for the New York City Department of Investigation (DOI), in announcing today the unsealing of multiple

indictments and a complaint charging 50 individuals with participating in a massive marijuana trafficking ring that transported ton-quantities of marijuana from Florida and California for distribution in the greater New York area from the early 1990's to 2010.

Manhattan U.S. Attorney PREET BHARARA said: "With today's arrests, we have successfully shut down a major pipeline for marijuana distribution in New York City. This successful operation was the result of a dedicated and ongoing partnership among federal, state, and local law enforcement and reaffirms our zero tolerance policy for those who flout our drug laws."

ICE HSI Special Agent-in-Charge JAMES T. HAYES, Jr., said: "These criminal organizations have allegedly dominated the illegal marijuana market in New York City for almost 20 years. The high profile stature of some of the alleged members of these organizations is especially troubling. Just as these organizations relied on each other to expand their illicit business and fuel the growth of their drug distribution network, ICE HSI will continue to partner with our federal, state and local law enforcement brethren to cripple those same networks."

DEA Special Agent-in-Charge JOHN P. GILBRIDE said: "Operation Green Venom was investigated and prosecuted as a team effort by federal, state, and local law enforcement entities. This organization fueled marijuana distribution from Florida to New York for one reason - to make a profit. Today's enforcement actions prove that as we work collectively with our law enforcement partners, drug trafficking organizations will be identified and investigated in order to bring drug traffickers to justice."

Special Narcotics Prosecutor BRIDGET G. BRENNAN said: "This case began with an investigation into the source of large amounts of laundered money and shows the extent to which trafficking in hydroponic marijuana has become the province of large organized criminal groups concerned only with profits. The interagency cooperation demonstrated in this case increasingly will be necessary to successfully prosecute organizations of this kind."

DOI Commissioner ROSE GILL HEARN said: "Individuals using New York City in drug trafficking operations will face concerted law enforcement response resulting in arrest and prosecution. DOI was

pleased to join with its law enforcement partners on this far-reaching investigation."

During a long-term investigation dubbed "Operation Green Venom," federal, state, and local law enforcement officers used over twenty wiretaps to infiltrate drug trafficking crews that controlled the importation and distribution of marijuana throughout the greater New York City area. Since July 2008, seizures totaling almost \$2 million in marijuana proceeds and over 360 pounds of marijuana have been linked to this organization.

After a coordinated takedown earlier today, including approximately 350 federal, state, and local law enforcement officers, 45 of the charged defendants are in custody. Five defendants are still at large. The defendants taken into custody today are expected to be presented in Manhattan federal court later this afternoon. During searches related to these arrests, agents and officers seized, among other evidence, over \$100,000 in cash, additional quantities of marijuana, three rifles, and a loaded handgun.

The allegations are described in greater detail below.

United States v. Manuel Geovanny Rodriguez-Perez, et al.

According to the Indictment unsealed by the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York today, MANUEL GEOVANNY RODRIGUEZ-PEREZ, a/k/a "Manny," a/k/a "Shorty," is the leader of the marijuana-trafficking conspiracy. The Indictment charges nine members of a "cell" that allegedly transported marijuana and marijuana proceeds between Florida and New York. Specifically, RODRIGUEZ, the primary user of over ten telephone lines intercepted during the investigation, has imported multi-ton quantities of marijuana into the New York City area since 1992.

During the investigation, RODRIGUEZ was intercepted over the wiretaps discussing violent acts, including his threat to "hunt" a customer who was late paying for marijuana. The Indictment also charges marijuana "brokers" who assembled marijuana in Florida for transportation to New York and elsewhere, individuals who provided access to transportation for brokers, and the drivers who transported the marijuana.

The Indictment seeks forfeiture of two tractor trailers from which marijuana and/or marijuana proceeds were seized, and at least seven separate properties owned by RODRIGUEZ in New York and in Florida.

United States v. Kareem Burke, a/k/a "Biggs," et al.

The Complaint charges 40 individuals with allegedly distributing marijuana in New York City and in New Jersey. These defendants include KAREEM BURKE, a/k/a "Biggs," one of the founders of Roc-A-Fella Records, MATTHEW WOODSTOCK STANG, a/k/a "Magazine Guy," an advertising representative for High Times magazine, and members of three separate "cells." While the three separate cells independently controlled areas where marijuana was sold, they depended on each other, and on the same transportation network, for the distribution of the marijuana they sold to customers in New York and New Jersey.

During the course of the investigation, law enforcement agents discovered the following:

- RODRIGUEZ discussed "grow houses" located in New York City and obtained marijuana from BURKE
- RODRIGUEZ discussed with BURKE the possibility of obtaining marijuana from California
- Members of the cells smuggled narcotics proceeds on commercial flights
- Members of the cells accessed a location that was later found to contain 22 pounds of marijuana and \$77,000

In addition to the charges filed by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, four defendants are also being charged by the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York ("SNP") with violating New York State marijuana trafficking laws.

Mr. BHARARA praised the outstanding investigative work of ICE HSI, DEA, the New York City Police Department, DOI, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Maryland State Police, the Bergen County, New Jersey, Police Department, the Rocky Mount, North Carolina, Police Department, the Miami Dade Police Department, the Greenburg, New York, Police Department, the Passaic County, New Jersey, Police

Department. He also thanked the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for New York City, and added that the investigation is continuing.

The prosecution of the cases arising from "Operation Green Venom" is being overseen by the Office's Narcotics Unit, with assistance from the Violent Crimes Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys AMIE N. ELY, DANIEL P. CHUNG, and SARAH E. MCCALLUM are in charge of the prosecution. Assistant U.S. Attorney MICHAEL D. LOCKARD of the Office's Asset Forfeiture Unit is responsible for forfeiture.

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