



Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York
Bridget G. Brennan, Special Narcotics Prosecutor

For Immediate Release
June 17, 2021

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Three Alleged Major Traffickers among 10 Charged in High-Level Narcotics Distribution across the Northeast

*Over 120 pounds of fentanyl, heroin and cocaine recovered in New York City,
Philadelphia and Lima, Peru: Two guns seized*

A long-term wiretap investigation uncovered a sophisticated network of alleged narcotics traffickers who distributed fentanyl, heroin and cocaine in New York City, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the ten men recently arrested in connection with this investigation, three were charged with Operating as Major Traffickers: JOSE AQUINO SUAREZ, ERICK ABREU-FLORES and RAMON ANTONIO BARDERA. These three allegedly obtained narcotics from international sources and oversaw large shipments of narcotics to the New York metropolitan area.

Bridget G. Brennan, New York City's Special Narcotics Prosecutor, Ray Donovan, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) New York Division, New York City Police Commissioner Dermot F. Shea and Peter C. Fitzhugh, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) New York, today announced the indictment and arrest of nine individuals. A tenth individual is charged in a criminal complaint. The majority of the defendants are scheduled to be arraigned this afternoon before Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Abraham Clott.

The investigation was conducted by the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force (NYDESF) Group Z-21. Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr. reviewed and submitted multiple eavesdropping applications for court authorization during the investigation.

In the early stages of the wiretap investigation, which began in January of 2020, members of NYDESF Group Z-21 identified SUAREZ, BARDERA, JAIME VINCENTE, ABREU-FLORES and JUAN RIVERA ALEMAN as alleged high-level traffickers who regularly bought and sold multi-kilogram quantities of fentanyl, heroin and cocaine to and from one another. Over time, the investigation expanded to include RAPHAEL ESPINAL, CARLOS AMPARO AVILA, JHAN PAULINO, OCTAVIO ROJAS and JORDANNY REYES.

Between August of 2020 and May of 2021, agents and officers recovered over 55 kilograms of narcotics (120 pounds), more than \$335,000 cash and two guns, as well as drug paraphernalia associated with the packaging of narcotics.

The wiretap investigation revealed the alleged traffickers regularly communicated by phone and discussed how to obtain narcotics during the COVID-19 pandemic, given new challenges for drug smuggling posed by border closures. The alleged traffickers bought and sold narcotics at inflated prices as their international sources of supply became harder to access. As detailed in the indictment, on multiple occasions BARDERA discussed receiving a shipment of narcotics to be sent from Peru. In August of 2020, DEA special agents in the capital city of Lima intercepted a package that BARDERA expected to receive in New York, and the agents recovered a kilogram of cocaine from hollowed-out wooden footstools.

In November of 2020, BARDERA and AVILA, who allegedly worked as a drug courier for BARDERA, coordinated the delivery of narcotics from an out-of-state tractor-trailer. On November 24, 2020, BARDERA and AVILA directed the tractor-trailer to a Dunkin' Donuts parking lot on Jerome Avenue in the Bronx. Shortly before midnight, members of NYDESF Group Z-21 seized the tractor-trailer and arrested AVILA and two others, who were in possession of a piston jack, impact driver and other tools. On November 25, 2020, a court-authorized search of the tractor-trailer uncovered more than 14 kilograms of heroin and fentanyl from inside the trailer axles.

In another large narcotics seizure on February 24, 2021, members of NYDESF Group Z-21 observed SUAREZ and ESPINAL meet in the vicinity of 1367 Bronx River Avenue at approximately 5 p.m. SUAREZ handed a brown paper bag to ESPINAL, who was seated in the driver's seat of a black Lexus sedan. Agents and officers followed ESPINAL as he drove away and stopped the car soon afterwards. Inside they discovered a plastic-wrapped kilogram of fentanyl inside a hidden compartment in the car.

Members of NYDESF later stopped SUAREZ outside 1367 Bronx River Avenue and obtained a court-authorized search warrant for SUAREZ's apartment, which was located in a rear basement apartment at this address. During the search, agents and officers recovered nine plastic-wrapped kilograms of fentanyl and a duffel bag containing approximately \$225,000 cash, as well as thousands of glassine envelopes, loose powdered heroin and fentanyl, pills and drug-packaging materials.

The majority of the defendants were arrested on May 13, 2021, when members of NYDESF Group Z-21 conducted searches of six apartments in the Bronx after obtaining court-authorized warrants. The residences of BARDERA, VINCENTE, ABREAU-FLORES, ALEMAN and ROJAS contained almost two kilograms of narcotics and over \$93,000 cash. A loaded 9 mm handgun was recovered from ALEMAN's apartment.

Before Strike Force members could secure the residences of VINCENTE and ABREU-FLORES, the two men allegedly attempted to dispose of narcotics: VINCENTE by throwing almost a kilogram of cocaine out a window onto a fire escape, and ABREU-FLORES by attempting to flush a bag of cocaine down a toilet.

That same day, members of NYDESF Group Z-21 also searched the apartment of REYES, a neighbor to BARDERA, residing at 2436 Webb Avenue, Apt. 3B, in the Bronx. The kitchen of the apartment contained a total of approximately 24 kilograms of fentanyl and heroin. Narcotics were inside a hidden compartment below a kitchen cabinet, an oven drawer and the freezer. Agents and officers also recovered a loaded handgun from a bedroom inside the apartment.

Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan thanked Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr. and Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark, and commended members of her office's Special Investigations Bureau and the New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force for their work on the long-term investigation.

The Strike Force is a crime-fighting unit comprising federal, state and local law enforcement agencies supported by the New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. Housed at the DEA's New York Division and includes agents and officers of the DEA; the New York City Police Department; the New York State Police; Immigration and Customs Enforcement – Homeland Security Investigations; the U.S. Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; U.S. Customs and Border Protection; U.S. Secret Service; the U.S. Marshals Service; New York National Guard; the Clarkstown Police Department; U.S. Coast Guard; Port Washington Police Department; and New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision.

“When pandemic border closings temporarily interrupted the flow of narcotics into the United States, these individuals are charged with scheming to smuggle lethal narcotics into New York and distribute them throughout the Northeast at inflated prices,” said Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan. “The scale of the narcotics smuggling operation upended by this investigation was staggering, as it attempted to take advantage of vulnerable communities and law enforcement facing unprecedented challenges. I thank our law enforcement partners for their dedication and commitment.”

“The last year and a half has challenged all of us,” said DEA Special Agent in Charge Ray Donovan. “While many chose to rise to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the defendants in this case chose to add to those challenges by flooding our communities with deadly amounts of heroin, fentanyl and cocaine, amplifying the rising number of overdose deaths. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor, as well as our partners in the NY Strike Force for their tenacity in bringing this investigation from the streets of NY all the way to illicit drug sources in South America.”

“As long as individuals – wherever they are based – are involved in illegal narcotics trafficking, we will work relentlessly to stop the threat to public safety. I commend and thank our colleagues at the city’s Special Narcotics Prosecutors, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration New York Division, Homeland Security Investigations, and the NYPD investigators involved in this investigation in building such a strong case,” said Police Commissioner Dermot Shea.

“As the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the United States and the rest of the world, the members of this Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO) continued to import deadly narcotics, including fentanyl, heroin and cocaine, and sought to capitalize on the scarcity of narcotics that resulted from the limited cross-border movement of people and merchandise,” said Peter C. Fitzhugh, Special Agent in Charge of HSI New York. “HSI New York’s agents at the OCDEF Strike Force will continue to work hand in hand with our law enforcement partners to dismantle these criminal organizations and seek justice for those they prey upon.”

Defendants	Charges
Jose Aquino Suarez Bronx, NY Age: 52	Conspiracy 2 nd – 1 ct Operating as a Major Trafficker – 1 ct CSCS 1 st – 1 ct CPCS 1 st – 1 ct CPCS 3 rd – 1 ct Criminally Using Drug Paraphernalia 2 nd – 2 cts
Raphael Espinal North Bergen, NJ Age: 33	Conspiracy 2 nd – 1 ct CPCS 1 st – 1 ct CPCS 3 rd – 1 ct
Ramon Antonio Bardera, aka Tio Bronx, NY Age: 65	Conspiracy 2 nd – 1 ct Operating as a Major Trafficker – 1 ct CPCS 1 st – 2 cts CPCS 2 nd – 1 ct CPCS 3 rd – 3 cts
Jaime Vincente	Conspiracy 2 nd – 1 ct

Bronx, NY Age: 49	CPCS 1 st – 1 ct CPCS 3 rd – 1 ct Criminally Using Drug Paraphernalia 2 nd – 2 cts
Erick Abreu-Flores Bronx, NY Age: 41	Conspiracy 2 nd – 1 ct Operating as a Major Trafficker – 1 ct CPCS 1 st – 1 ct CPCS 3 rd – 1 ct Tampering with Physical Evidence – 1 ct Criminally Using Drug Paraphernalia 2 nd – 2 cts CPCS 7 th – 1 ct
Juan Rivera Aleman aka Richard Bronx, NY Age: 49	Conspiracy 2 nd – 1 ct CPCS 1 st – 1 ct CPCS 3 rd – 1 ct Criminally Using Drug Paraphernalia 2 nd – 2 cts CPW 2 nd – 2 cts
Carlos Amparo Avila San Martin, DR Age: 29	Conspiracy 2 nd – 1 ct CPCS 1 st – 1 ct CPCS 3 rd – 1 ct
Jhan Paulino Bronx, NY Age: 33	Conspiracy 2 nd – 1 ct CPCS 1 st – 1 ct CPCS 3 rd – 1 ct
Octavio Rojas, aka Horton Bronx, NY Age: 62	Conspiracy 2 nd – 1 ct CPCS 3 rd – 1 ct Criminally Using Drug Paraphernalia 2 nd – 2 cts CPCS 7 th – 1 ct
Jordanny Reyes Bronx, NY Age: 22	CPCS 1 st – 1 ct CPCS 3 rd – 1 ct Criminally Using Drug Paraphernalia 2 nd – 1 ct

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