



# U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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STATEMENT

OF

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U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT  
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REGARDING A HEARING ON

“COMBATING GANG VIOLENCE ON LONG ISLAND: SHUTTING DOWN THE MS-13  
PIPELINE”

BEFORE THE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COUNTERTERRORISM AND INTELLIGENCE

Tuesday, June 20, 2017  
100 Federal Plaza  
Central Islip, New York

Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, and distinguished members:

As Special Agent in Charge for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in New York, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss our efforts to disrupt, dismantle, and investigate violent gang activity within the United States. The official statement I have submitted and my oral testimony today will focus specifically on HSI's focus on combatting transnational gang violence by the Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, on Long Island.

ICE has the most expansive investigative authority and largest force of criminal investigators in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). ICE's national and global footprint enables us to leverage our broad statutory authority to uphold public safety and support border enforcement. And the key to our success against gangs like MS-13 is our multifaceted approach to attacking violent crime with our state, local, tribal, and foreign law enforcement partners.

During his first two weeks in office, President Trump signed a series of Executive Orders (EOs) that laid the policy groundwork for the Department and ICE to carry out the critical work of securing our borders, enforcing our immigration laws, and ensuring that individuals who pose a threat to national security or public safety cannot enter or remain in the United States. These EOs establish the Administration's policy of effective border security and immigration enforcement through the faithful execution of the laws passed by Congress.

The heightened enforcement of our Nation's immigration laws in the interior of the United States is critically important to the national security and public safety of the United States. Aliens who illegally enter the United States, or even those who overstay or otherwise violate the terms of their visas, have violated our nation's laws and can pose a threat to national security and public safety. This is particularly true for aliens who engage in criminal conduct in the United States.

As directed by the President's Executive Order 13773, *Enforcing Federal Law with Respect to Transnational Criminal Organizations and Preventing International Trafficking*, ICE will continue to give a high priority and devote sufficient resources to dismantling TCOs and subsidiary organizations. ICE will continue to focus on cooperative work and data sharing with other Federal agencies, as well as work with foreign counterparts by sharing intelligence and law enforcement information when appropriate and permitted by law.

### **MS-13 Activity in New York**

MS-13 are primarily immigrants or descendants of immigrants from the Northern Triangle – El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Through kidnappings, murders, and other violent crime, MS-13 terrorizes communities. Since the beginning of 2017, New York has seen an uptick in gang violence, with 11 murders attributed to MS-13 alone. The gruesome murders of four Long Island teenagers at the hands of MS-13 just this April shocked our nation.

HSI does not take this lightly. To disrupt the MS-13 threat, HSI has uncovered and pieced together MS-13's sophisticated communication and financial network. As we have learned, MS-13's primary source of income is generated through extortion, prostitution, membership dues, and illicit trafficking. Targeting MS-13's assets, HSI was pivotal in having MS-13 designated as a transnational criminal organization by the Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

## **Disrupting the MS-13 Pipeline**

HSI's ever-evolving strategy to investigate and disrupt MS-13 is informed by how the gang operates. Let me touch on three critical points:

### First, Illicit Pathways

MS-13 exploits illicit pathways throughout Central and South America to further its mission to "rape, control, and kill."

HSI, through its unique border authorities and vast international footprint, is targeting these illicit pathways. HSI New York established an Extraterritorial Criminal Travel Strike Force, which, in partnership with Department of Justice (DOJ), investigates foreign-based Human Smuggling Networks that pose a threat to the United States. Just this May, ICE implemented a three-phase plan to target the human smuggling organizations that MS-13 exploits to bring unaccompanied alien children into the United States.

### Second, Recruitment

Illicit pathways go hand-in-hand with MS-13 increasing its membership. Once these children are smuggled into the United States, they become prime targets for enlistment into the gang. Since the beginning of fiscal year 2015, more than **5,000** unaccompanied alien children have resettled in Long Island. MS-13 preys on their vulnerability; some of these children may lack familial relationships or community ties. In fact, reports suggest that MS-13 attempts to recruit in some schools and pressures children into joining with the threat of retribution.

With the invaluable partnership of local law enforcement, HSI has kept its proverbial finger on the pulse of MS-13 activity across Long Island.

### Third, Financing

MS-13 cannot survive without money. Investigations have revealed that MS-13 maintains a sophisticated communication and financial network that supports its nefarious activities. As we have learned, MS-13 generates illicit income through extortion, prostitution, membership dues, and illicit trafficking.

## **Operation Community Shield**

In 2005, ICE initiated Operation Community Shield (OCS), a cross-border effort to combat transnational criminal organizations. HSI locates, investigates, and arrests gang members to get them off our streets. Whenever possible, ICE will pursue and effectuate removal orders to remove gang members from the United States.

OCS is the primary platform through which HSI executes its anti-gang initiatives, including Specialized Urban Response – Gang Enforcement (SURGE) operations. From March 26, 2017 to May 6, 2017, a nationwide SURGE operation led to 1,098 criminal arrests and 280 administrative immigration arrests. In the course of those operations, HSI seized 238 firearms, nearly \$500,000 in currency, and over 271 kilograms of illicit narcotics.

Since this operation started in 2005, HSI and its partner agencies have made over 57,000 gang-related criminal and administrative immigration arrests. 7,000 of these arrests were affiliated with MS-13.

From Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 to FY 2017 (as of June 4, 2017), HSI has made over 8,000 gang-related criminal arrests, leading to over 2,600 convictions. During this same time period, HSI made 1,117 administrative immigration arrests of gang members.

Much of this enforcement activity targets MS-13. From FY 2016 to FY 2017 (as of June 4, 2017), HSI made 602 criminal arrests of MS-13 gang leaders, members, and associates that resulted so far in 153 convictions. And during this same time period, HSI made 170 administrative immigration arrests of MS-13 members. HSI has 87 domestic and international gang investigations targeting MS-13 in Long Island and throughout the country.

### **Federal, State and Local Law Enforcement Partnerships**

In response to the recent spate of extreme violence perpetrated by MS-13, HSI New York initiated Operation Matador (OPMAT). This interagency DHS endeavor is designed to combat the proliferation of MS-13 recruitment, membership, and criminal activity.

The framework underlying OPMAT integrates various missions – enforcement, interdiction, intelligence, border security, and ultimately, public safety.

OPMAT is able to disrupt MS-13 through five key attributes:

1. Intelligence gathering;
2. Actionable lead development;
3. Targeted enforcement;
4. Criminal and Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) investigation development; and
5. Community outreach to at-risk youth in the affected cities.

As a result of this ongoing operation, to date, HSI has made 35 criminal and administrative arrests; 30 of them are known or suspected MS-13 members. It bears repeating that our law enforcement partners are crucial to OPMAT's success, including the Nassau County

Police Department, Suffolk County Police Department, and the New York Police Department (NYPD).

### **Operation Matador**

In response to the recent uptick of extreme violence perpetrated by MS-13, HSI-NY's latest endeavor is Operation Matador. It brings together our DHS partners in a unified approach to combatting MS-13's growth by integrating key missions – enforcement, interdiction, intelligence, border security, and ultimately, public safety. As a result of this ongoing operation, to date, HSI has made 35 criminal and administrative arrests; 30 of them are known or suspected MS-13 members.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your continued support of ICE and its law enforcement mission. ICE is committed to investigating MS-13 gang violence and disrupting the MS-13 pipeline.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.