



NEWS RELEASE

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INS Breaks Up Major Child Smuggling Ring *Children Smuggled From El Salvador*

WASHINGTON D.C. –Today, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Executive Associate Commissioner for Field Operations Johnny Williams announced the arrest in Houston on Friday of three members of an El Salvadoran smuggling ring, capping an investigation of a multinational child smuggling operation. The ring is responsible for the smuggling of children and young adults from El Salvador and Guatemala into the United States. Friday's arrests brought to five the number of defendants who are in U.S. custody and under indictment in the United States District Court in the District of Columbia.

INS special agents from Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. arrested Berta Campos, an alleged leader of the smuggling operation, on July 15, 2002, in Los Angeles. Campos and the other defendants are charged in indictments obtained by the United States Attorney's Office in Washington, D.C. and the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice with Conspiracy to Commit Alien Smuggling. The three defendants arrested in Houston last Friday, Aug.9, are Ana Karina Cruz Rivas, Juan Orlando Servellon De Leon, and Andrea Giron. The fifth defendant is Guillermo Antonio Paniagua, who was arrested on June 13, 2002, also in Houston. They all have been charged with Conspiracy to Commit Alien Smuggling. The four arrests in Houston followed expulsion of the defendants from Guatemala. Campos was found by INS in Los Angeles.

"The smuggling of children over hundreds of miles in the hands of unscrupulous smugglers is extremely dangerous and will not be tolerated," said Williams. "Breaking up this criminal organization is a credit to the dedication of law enforcement to ending the illegal smuggling of children for profit, and a shining example of the cooperation between the governments of the United States, El Salvador, and Guatemala."

"Those who engage in alien smuggling should know that they do so at their peril. We will continue to be vigilant in our ongoing efforts to stop this exploitive, dangerous and unlawful business," said Roscoe C. Howard, Jr., the United States Attorney for the District of Columbia. "Working together with our law enforcement partners at INS, and with the assistance of its counterparts abroad, we will make every effort to secure our borders by investigating and prosecuting those who violate our immigration laws and at the same time exploit the vulnerable."

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The investigation, which included INS officers in El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico City, Washington, D.C., Houston, and Los Angeles as well as law enforcement officers from the Salvadoran National Civil Police (Border Police Investigation Unit), the Guatemalan Migration Office, the Guatemalan National Civil Police, and the Guatemalan Fiscal General's office (Attorney General's office).

"This joint international investigation has dismantled an organization that specialized in the smuggling of children into the United States," said Warren Lewis, director of the INS Washington District Office. "Our efforts today would not have been successful without the partnership and assistance from our foreign law enforcement counterparts."

On April 5, 2002, seven public transport buses were intercepted by Guatemalan authorities, resulting in the rescue of 53 children, ranging in age from 2 years to 17 years, and the arrest of 12 smugglers. Special agents from INS offices in Mexico City, El Salvador, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C., worked with law enforcement officers in El Salvador and Guatemala to investigate the smuggling ring after they had learned that children were being transported from El Salvador to the United States.

Campos has appeared in the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles and has been ordered to be sent to the District of Columbia to face the charges in the indictment. The three defendant's arrested in Houston on Friday will have preliminary proceedings in the U.S. District Court in Houston before ultimately also being sent to Washington. Defendant Paniaqua has been presented before Judge Richard J. Leon of the United States District Court in Washington, D.C. A status hearing in the case is scheduled for August 14, 2002.

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