

## JUSTICE NEWS

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#### **Members and Associates of Barrio Azteca Gang Plead Guilty and Are Sentenced in El Paso, Texas, for Roles in Racketeering Conspiracy and Related Crimes**

WASHINGTON – An associate of the Barrio Azteca (BA) gang was sentenced today for her participation in a money laundering conspiracy. Yesterday, a BA gang member pleaded guilty, and three additional gang members and associates were sentenced to prison for their respective roles in a racketeering and drug trafficking conspiracy.

The guilty plea and prison sentences were announced by Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Robert Pitman for the Western District of Texas, FBI Assistant Director of the Criminal Investigative Division Kevin Perkins and Administrator Michele M. Leonhart of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

Desiree Gamboa Cardona, 30, of El Paso, was sentenced today before U.S. District Judge Kathleen Cardone to 12 months and one day in prison. Cardona, a BA associate, pleaded guilty on Aug. 2, 2011, to conspiracy to commit money laundering.

BA gang member Santiago Lucero, 38, aka "Sonny," of El Paso, pleaded guilty yesterday before U.S. District Magistrate Judge Norbert J. Garney in the Western District of Texas, El Paso Division, to racketeering conspiracy. A sentencing date has not yet been set by the court. At sentencing, Lucerno faces a maximum penalty of life in prison.

Jesus Espino, 33, and Delia Cervantes, 44, aka "Guera," both of El Paso, were sentenced yesterday by Judge Cardone to 30 years and 70 months in prison, respectively. Espino, a gang member, pleaded guilty on Sept. 22, 2011, to participating in a racketeering conspiracy and Cervantes, a gang associate, pleaded guilty on July 20, 2011, to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute heroin and conspiracy to import heroin.

BA associate Lorenzo Espino, 41, aka "Lencho" and "Oso," of El Paso, also was sentenced yesterday by Judge Cardone to 151 months in prison. Lorenzo Espino pleaded guilty on Sept. 22, 2011, for his role in the racketeering conspiracy.

According to court documents, the Barrio Azteca gang began in the late 1980s as a violent prison gang and has

expanded into a transnational criminal organization. The BA is primarily based in West Texas; Juarez, Mexico; and throughout state and federal prisons in the United States and Mexico. The gang has a militaristic command structure and includes captains, lieutenants, sergeants, soldiers and associates – all with the purpose of maintaining power and enriching its members and associates through drug trafficking, money laundering, extortion, intimidation, violence, threats of violence and murder.

According to court documents, members and associates of the BA have engaged in a host of criminal activity committed since Jan. 1, 2003, including drug trafficking, extortion, money laundering, kidnapping and murder, including the March 13, 2010, murders in Juarez of U.S. consulate employee Leslie Ann Enriquez Catton, her husband Arthur Redelfs and Jorge Alberto Salcido Cenicerros, the husband of a U.S. consulate employee.

The BA profits by importing heroin, cocaine and marijuana into the United States from Mexico. Gang members and associates also allegedly charge a “street tax” or “cuota” on businesses and criminals operating in their turf. These profits are used to support gang members in prison by funneling money into prison commissary accounts of gang leaders and to pay for defense lawyers or fines. The “cuota” profits are also allegedly reinvested into the organization to purchase drugs, guns and ammunition.

According to information presented in court, as a BA officer, Jesus Espino helped coordinate the distribution of marijuana, cocaine and heroin in the Western District of Texas and elsewhere. Lorenzo Espino assisted in the distribution of heroin while Cervantes distributed heroin and paid street tax to the BA for protection. Cardona helped distribute BA proceeds to members incarcerated in the state and federal prison systems.

Thirty-five members and associates of the BA gang, including Lucero and 14 others who have pleaded guilty, were charged in a third superseding indictment unsealed in March 2011 with various counts of racketeering, murder, drug offenses, money laundering and obstruction of justice. Trial is set to begin April 6, 2012.

The case is being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Joseph A. Cooley of the Criminal Division’s Organized Crime and Gang Section, Trial Attorney Brian Skaret of the Criminal Division’s Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section and the U.S. Attorney’s Office of the Western District of Texas - El Paso Division. The U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of New Mexico provided significant assistance in this case, including Assistant U.S. Attorney Sarah Davenport. Valuable assistance was provided by the Criminal Division’s Offices of International Affairs and Enforcement Operations.

The case was investigated by the FBI’s El Paso Field Office. Special assistance was provided by the DEA; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Immigration and Customs Enforcement; the U.S. Marshals Service; U.S. Customs and Border Protection; Federal Bureau of Prisons; U.S. Diplomatic Security Service; the Texas Department of Public Safety; the Texas Department of Criminal Justice; El Paso Police Department; El Paso County Sheriff’s Office; El Paso Independent School District Police Department; Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission; New Mexico State Police; Dona Ana County, N.M., Sheriff’s Office; Las Cruces, N.M., Police Department; Southern New Mexico Correctional Facility and Otero County Prison Facility New Mexico.