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For Immediate Release  
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**MAJOR DISTRIBUTORS OF HEROIN AND FENTANYL IN BRONX AND  
NORTHEAST AMONG 32 PEOPLE INDICTED IN INTERNATIONAL SCHEME  
53 Lbs. of Heroin Intercepted Last Weekend; Brings Total to More Than 103 Lbs. of  
Heroin & Fentanyl--Worth \$22 Million—Seized;  
Bronx DA’s Office Also Suing Defendants for \$10.5 Million in Alleged Proceeds;  
Drugs From Honduras & Mexico Transported Across U.S. By Long-Haul Truckers**

Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark today announced that more than 103 pounds of heroin and fentanyl have been recovered in a joint investigation by the Bronx District Attorney’s Office, the New York City Police Department and the Drug Enforcement Administration that has resulted in the indictment of 32 people for Operating as a Major Trafficker and other charges. The defendants are also being sued for \$10.5 million in profits of their alleged drug enterprise.

The scheme brought heroin and fentanyl from Honduras through Mexico to Los Angeles, where long-haul truck drivers picked it up and transported it to the New York area in tractor-trailers carrying legitimate cargo.

District Attorney Clark said, “We have dismantled a major network, prevented over 100 pounds of these devastating drugs from reaching our streets, and the defendants face charges carrying a life sentence. We have also filed a civil suit against the defendants for \$10.5 million, to seize some of the profits they allegedly reaped in their repugnant trade.

“This operation spanned three countries and trafficked drugs 5,200 miles. No matter. We will go wherever investigations take us to eradicate this scourge that has destroyed lives here in the Bronx and across the nation.”

New York City Police Commissioner James P. O’Neill said, “The New York City Police Department is fully committed to addressing the heroin health crisis afflicting our region. The dedicated work of our investigators, prosecutors and federal law enforcement partners were brought to bear during this long-term investigation, targeting and dismantling an allegedly lucrative trafficking operation with ties well beyond our borders. These indictments should affirm to anyone engaging to the destruction of lives through the sale of heroin that, regardless of how sophisticated their operation might be, the NYPD is always poised to aggressively and successfully disrupt them.”

Drug Enforcement Administration Special Agent in Charge James J. Hunt said, “Every day in New York City, two people fatally overdose from heroin and/or fentanyl. Today’s drug traffickers moonlight as bath tub chemists by mixing heroin with compounds strong enough to kill an elephant. They keep the price low, the purity high and monopolize on the users’ physical dependence on opioids. Heroin and fentanyl are the nation’s number one drug threat and distribution networks like Alvarez’ are responsible for the proliferation of this health crisis throughout the Northeast.”

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District Attorney Clark said the defendants are charged in a 72-count indictment with second-degree and fourth-degree Conspiracy, Operating as a Major Trafficker, and variously charged with first and third-degree Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance and first, second, third and seventh-degree Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance. Twenty-two of the defendants were arrested, and so far 10 have been arraigned before Bronx Supreme Court Justice Steven Barrett. Two were already incarcerated. If convicted of Operating as a Major Trafficker, the defendants could face life in prison.

The investigation, dubbed "Operation Open Market," began in February, 2016, when the NYPD Bronx Gang Squad began investigating flagrant crack cocaine selling on McClellan Street and Grant Avenue in the Concourse neighborhood of the Bronx, allegedly overseen by Steven Rivera and Daniel Rivera, who are brothers. They allegedly arranged drug sales and supplied narcotics to street-level dealers, identified as Juan Santiago, Kareem Hogan, Antoin Ramirez and Harvey Gonzalez.

Police soon determined that people were coming from out-of-state to buy heroin there, and that the defendants were running a wholesale heroin and cocaine trafficking network, allegedly supplied by defendants Jason Alvarez, Viannet Espinal and Joel Velazquez. Alvarez with his family runs Celia's Restaurant on Fordham Road, where he was seen on surveillance allegedly conducting transactions for the narcotics operation.

Defendants Steven Gonzalez and Gina DiBacca, of Worcester, MA, allegedly purchased \$33,500 worth of heroin a month for at least eight months and took it to Worcester, where they sold it for four times the price they paid in the Bronx.

Alvarez allegedly procured the heroin and fentanyl, arranging for the drugs to be brought from Honduras through Mexico and to the Los Angeles area. He arranged for truck drivers to pick them up and transport them across the country to the east coast.

On June 8, 2016, 10 kilograms of fentanyl and 12 kilograms of heroin — together worth \$14 million in street value — were seized in the Bronx from a car driven by defendant Mariano Guzman from Sugarloaf, PA, a small town off Interstate 80. On December 27, 2016, a kilogram of fentanyl was seized from a livery car whose passenger, defendant Hector Taveras, had just picked it up from Espinal.

Drug Enforcement Administration agents seized \$920,000 in cash during the investigation.

Working with the DEA, investigators monitoring wiretaps learned that two truck drivers would be picking up shipments in Los Angeles in mid-January. Last Saturday, January 28, 2017, one tractor-trailer driven by defendant David Arzu arrived in the Bronx, carrying 10 kilos of heroin in a wheel well. Police intercepted the other tractor-trailer in Pennsylvania, arresting the driver (who is not among the indicted defendants) and recovering 14 kilos of heroin in it.

On Tuesday, January 31, 2017, NYPD and DEA began arresting the defendants and conducting search warrants. They confiscated \$32,420 cash from Alvarez' apartment in Fort Lee, NJ; a .40-caliber Ruger pistol, approximately \$20,000 cash and crack cocaine from Daniel Rivera's apartment, and crack cocaine and heroin from Espinal's apartment. They also

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confiscated three Mercedes Benz vehicles.

District Attorney Clark also announced that her office filed a civil lawsuit today in Bronx Supreme Court suing the defendants for \$10.5 million in currency and property, the alleged proceeds of their organization during the 8-month investigation. The defendants are being sued as “criminal defendants” who are criminally liable for a “pre-conviction forfeiture crime.”

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant District Attorneys Paul Irace of the Gangs/Major Case Bureau and Christine Scaccia, Chief of the Gangs/Major Case Bureau and Deputy Chief of the Homicide Bureau. District Attorney Clark thanked Tarek Rahman, Chief of the Special Investigations Unit, and Detective Investigators T. J. Eugene and Barry Vaughn, and Chief Frank Chiara of the Bronx District Attorney’s Detective Investigators.

District Attorney Clark also thanked Detectives David Robinson and Jeffrey Scalf and Sergeant Leo Nugent of the NYPD Bronx Gang Squad, and Drug Enforcement Administration Group D-24.

The civil action is being litigated by Assistant District Attorneys Cristina Paquette and Jennifer Shaw of the Asset Forfeiture Unit under the supervision of Lisa Waller, Deputy Chief of the Civil Litigation Bureau.

**An indictment is an accusatory instrument and not proof of a defendant’s guilt.**

## **DEFENDANTS**

JASON ALVAREZ (AKA JAY), 37, Fort Lee, NJ  
VIANNET ESPINAL (AKA SKID), 39, Bronx  
JOEL VELAZQUEZ (AKA GUCCI), 27, Bronx  
RONNIE ALLEGRIA, 29, Manhattan  
CYNTHIA ALEGRIA, 36, Bronx  
MARIANO GUZMAN, 45, Bronx  
ADAN BONES (AKA Emilio Aguillar), 24, Bayonne, NJ  
DAVID ARZU, 36, Bronx  
ARIEL LUNA (AKA HANNIBAL), 37, Bronx  
HECTOR LOPEZ (AKA TITO), 46, Bronx  
EDGAR ALVAREZ, 48, Buffalo, NY  
ADOLPHO VARGAS (AKA DOC), 42, Bronx  
HECTOR TAVERAS (AKA ALBERTO TORBELLINO), 36, Bronx  
JACOB BERKHART (AKA BYRD), 37, Buffalo, NY  
STEVEN RIVERA (AKA STEVE-O), 40, Bronx  
DANIEL RIVERA, (AKA D-BOY), 34, Manhattan  
JUAN SANTIAGO (AKA GORDO), 22, Bronx  
KAREEM HOGAN (AKA REMO), 36, Bronx  
ANTOIN RAMIREZ (AKA JUNE), 35, Bronx  
HARVEY GONZALEZ, 54, Bronx  
MARVIN EASTON (AKA MILLS), 28, Bronx  
RALPHIE GOMEZ, Bronx  
CHRISTIAN MOREJON (AKA CEEZ), Bronx  
JOSE RAMOS, 37, Bronx  
STEVEN GONZALEZ (AKA STEVIE G), 38, Worcester, MA  
GINA DIBACCA, 32, Worcester, MA  
XENIA MEJIAS (AKA X), 46, Bronx  
JEANETTE SOTOMAYOR, 35, Bronx  
LUZ VARAHONA, 34, Bayonne, NJ

John Doe SIR, Mexico  
John Doe PANCHO  
John Doe PUGLOSO