



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

Remarks As Prepared For Deputy Assistant Secretary John Clark

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

2004 National HIDTA Program Conference

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Thank you very much. I'm pleased to join you this afternoon to discuss the role that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement plays in our nation's counter-narcotics strategy and in the HIDTA program.

Given the time of day and the fact that we're nearing the end of the conference, I don't think anyone will object if I keep my remarks relatively brief. That should give everyone a little more time to prepare for tonight's awards dinner, where we'll be honoring a number of people for their contributions to the HIDTA program – including, I'm proud to note, one of ICE's Supervisory Intelligence Analysts from New York, Alan Goldfisher. I hope I'm not spoiling any surprises by recognizing Alan here this afternoon. But I did want to take this opportunity to extend my personal congratulations to him, as well as my thanks for his outstanding work on behalf of ICE.

As you all know, ICE is a relatively new law enforcement agency, established two years ago as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. Even though we have a new, expanded mission under Homeland Security, our investigators have a long and distinguished history of fighting drug trafficking and money laundering both in the United States and around the world. That's a mission in which we've had some tremendous successes – and we owe part of that success to the support we've received under the HIDTA program.

Let me give one recent example: Just last week, ICE secured the extradition of Gilberto Rodriguez-Orejuela, a founder of the Cali cartel – one of the largest drug trafficking networks in Colombia. At one time, the Cali organization was responsible for roughly 80 PERCENT of the cocaine coming into the United States – a staggering proportion. They had billions of dollars and a virtual army at their command, which they used to target their competitors and political opponents, subjecting Colombia to a bloody reign of terror.

Today, Rodriguez-Orejuela sits in a federal prison cell in Florida. He was brought down by an ICE investigation that extended over the last fourteen years. Over that time, we were fortunate to have the cooperation and support of our partners at the DEA and the Justice Department, in Colombian law enforcement – and, not least of all, our partners at the ONDCP and HIDTA, from whom we have received critical funding and support that allowed our investigators to build that case and keep the pressure on the cartel.

This case is an excellent example of how a coordinated approach to investigations and enforcement, of the type that HIDTA has built in locations around the country, can pay big dividends.

It also illustrates how ICE is continuing to pursue our legacy counter-narcotics efforts under the auspices of Homeland Security, and how our new mission has enabled us to strengthen those efforts.

ICE's focus within homeland security is to target vulnerabilities—vulnerabilities that expose our borders to infiltration; that open our financial systems to exploitation; and that weaken our national security.

Smuggling and trafficking, for example, are direct threats to our border security and to public safety. A criminal organization that exploits our borders to bring in narcotics could easily employ those methods to bring in components for weapons of mass destruction, for the right amount of money. A smuggler who preys on individuals seeking to come to America for jobs and economic opportunities could use the same routes and methods and exploit border vulnerabilities to bring terrorists into our country. Whatever is being smuggled – whether it's narcotics, weapons, or human beings – the basic motivator for these criminal networks is money.

Furthermore, smuggling organizations don't observe traditional divisions of labor. In fact, if you look at how organized smuggling networks operate, you will see that the most

effective smuggling organizations have tremendous flexibility when it comes to what they smuggle. Using the same routes and methods, they may smuggle narcotics one week and human “cargo” the next, shifting their tactics in response to demand, profit margins, and changes in enforcement patterns.

With ICE, we’ve combined customs and immigration authorities into a single, unified agency -- which has created, in effect, an “in-house task force” that allows us to match the smuggling organizations at every step as they shift from one criminal enterprise to another. Whether it’s narcotics smuggled through an airport or aliens smuggled into the country along our southwest border, ICE responds with the law enforcement tools necessary to dismantle the criminal enterprise, seize their contraband, and seize their profits.

What are these powerful tools? The first is our extensive expertise in investigating financial crime. Criminal organizations such as drug traffickers or alien smuggling rings – or, for that matter, terrorist organizations -- have to find ways to disguise their illegal profits. They need to have ways to earn, move, and store their proceeds.

That’s why ICE targets money service businesses, bulk cash smuggling, and trade-based money laundering, all of which are common methods used to launder drug proceeds.

With the financial investigations expertise we've built up over the last three decades, we're able to seize assets, freeze bank accounts, and trace co-conspirators in their networks. That's a powerful set of weapons in fighting drug traffickers.

Immigration enforcement authority is the other tool that we use to attack and dismantle smuggling organizations—whether they smuggle drugs or people—and to bring other federal charges against targets or potential informants in ongoing drug smuggling investigations.

This strategy has been used very successfully by drug enforcement task forces in the past, including HIDTA task forces. I can point to an excellent example of how ICE has put these combined authorities to work in Arizona, where we've developed "Operation ICE Storm" as a task force approach to fight human smuggling at the southwest border.

Under ICE Storm, we're attacking smuggling organizations that move people but that also, in some cases, move drugs. In fact, we are seeing significant results – notably in the measurable decrease in violent crime in the Phoenix area. In ICE Storm's first year on the ground, we've brought charges against more than 285 criminal defendants, and we've seized approximately \$5.5 million in suspect currency. And although narcotics aren't the central focus of ICE Storm, we've effected roughly a dozen narcotics seizures since the program was initiated last year. By targeting these organized smuggling organizations and putting them out of business, ICE is making a critical contribution to the war on drugs.

But we also know that, in spite of the great progress we've made, we continue to face great challenges. We still must contend with the proliferation of new and dangerous drugs into our communities, and how they spread across the country more rapidly than ever before. We need only consider, for example, how quickly methamphetamine found a foothold in virtually every community in the United States in recent years.

And we have to contend with the ever-increasing sophistication of drug organizations. If there's an undeniable fact about the criminal organizations we are facing, it is that they are in many respects more professional and more innovative than ever before. Consider just a few examples from the ICE case file:

- In Miami, ICE agents, working with the Miami Dade Police Department and Customs and Border Protection officers, seized five pallets of children's fruit juice boxes filled with liquefied heroin.
- In Las Vegas, ICE uncovered a scheme in which a man was acting as an online drug dealer, selling prescription drugs and even "date rape" drugs over the Internet.
- In New York, several airline employees were identified as part of a narcotics smuggling and money laundering operation in which they exploited their access to the airport and airlines to move drugs and money around the country.

I'm sure that everyone sitting in this room could supply their own examples and stories that illustrate how flexible, creative and dangerous these schemes can be.

What we should take from this is that law enforcement needs to be equally sophisticated, innovative, and flexible in meeting this threat. We have to be prepared to pool our resources, our legal authorities, and our investigative tools in order to secure the best results. We have to recognize that the trafficking threat will look very different in different parts of the country. No single strategy is going to be successful in every region or against every threat.

That is why cooperative programs like HIDTA and OCDEF are so valuable, because they allow us to do just that. They allow us to build the flexible task forces and develop the creative investigative solutions we need to crack these cases. In virtually all of the ICE cases I've noted today, our success has turned on the cooperation and coordination that we've received from our partners at the local, state, and federal levels. In all of these cases, we were able to pool our resources and calibrate our efforts to make them more effective – with excellent results.

Look at the impressive work that ICE agents and our partners in other agencies are doing with the El Dorado Task Force in New York – one of the nation's most successful HIDTAs. Just last week, the El Dorado Task Force made a massive seizure of almost \$2 million in drug money in New York City. That's \$2 million in profits that the drug

traffickers won't have at their disposal, and it represents a tremendous return on investment for the HIDTA program.

It's just one example of the outstanding work that all of our people are doing as part of HIDTA, and it's a testament to the types of things we can accomplish through interagency cooperation and coordination. This cooperation is key to winning the war on drugs, and ICE is proud to be a part of that effort.

And finally, we need to continue building up channels for effective communication and information-sharing. Many of you are no doubt familiar with ICE's Law Enforcement Support Center, which is a central point of contact for law enforcement agencies who need information on the identity, immigration status, or criminal background of suspects and detainees. The LESC is one of our top initiatives for sharing information with officers in the field, who are on the front lines of ensuring the safety of our communities and the security of our homeland. It's a model for effective information-sharing between the Department of Homeland Security and our law enforcement partners, and just one example of our commitment to working with you. Given that information is a powerful weapon in the fight against drug trafficking and smuggling, I encourage all of you to make use of this powerful tool.

Narcotics smuggling poses a threat to our nation -- both as a direct result of the horrific effects the drug trade has on our society, and as a national security issue. While we have made substantial progress in the fight against these smugglers and traffickers, much

remains to be done. Fortunately, we have support for our efforts at the highest levels of government. Just last month in Colombia, President Bush reaffirmed his commitment to winning the war on drugs, declaring that the defeat of the drug trafficking organizations should be a vital goal for our government and our allies. Just as importantly, the President called for a “basic optimism” that we will win this war. At ICE, we share that commitment, we share that optimism, and we look forward to great success in working with you toward that goal. Thank you very much.