



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **ICE UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATION DISMANTLES INTERNATIONAL DRUG MONEY LAUNDERING ORGANIZATION** *24 indicted in money laundering conspiracy that spanned three continents*

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – H.S. Garcia, the U.S. Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico, today announced the indictment of 24 individuals for their role in a complex drug money laundering conspiracy that spanned the United States, South America, Europe, and the Caribbean.

The multi-agency undercover investigation, which was led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents from the Department of Homeland Security, resulted in 14 arrests this morning in Puerto Rico, Colombia, and St. Maarten, N.A. Five other individuals had already been arrested in the investigation.

In addition, the investigation has thus far resulted in the seizure of roughly 250 kilograms of cocaine, 11 kilograms of heroin, 12 domestic and international bank accounts, at least \$900,000 in U.S. currency, as well as an assortment of weapons and vehicles.

Roberto G. Medina, the ICE Special Agent-in-Charge for Puerto Rico, said: "This operation combined the best investigative techniques of U.S. and foreign law enforcement to dismantle a money laundering organization whose reach spanned the globe."

The investigation targeted an organization based in Bogotá, Colombia, that was allegedly led by brothers **Juan Isidro Toloza-Pena** and **Juan Andres Toloza-Pena**. According to the indictment, the brothers and 21 co-conspirators arranged for the smuggling of cocaine and heroin from Colombia and Venezuela to the continental United States, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, and Europe.

The defendants then used a complex system known as the Black Market Peso Exchange to launder their illicit drug proceeds, the indictment alleges. The Black Market Peso Exchange is a decades-old money laundering infrastructure that is estimated to handle billions worth of illicit dollars annually. It is among the primary means by which Colombian drug cartels convert their U.S.-based drug dollars into "clean" pesos that they can use in Colombia.

According to the indictment, the defendants delivered large sums of drug cash to individuals in Miami and Puerto Rico and instructed that the cash be introduced into the U.S. banking system and wired to specified bank accounts throughout the United States, Colombia, Costa Rica, and China, for ultimate payment to the Colombian owners of the money. As part of the conspiracy, the defendants also created and invested in allegedly legitimate businesses to conceal the nature and source of the money, the indictment alleges.

The indictment alleges violations of Title 21, United States Code, Sections 1956 and 982, and Title 21 USC, Sections 846, 853 and 881. As part of the money laundering forfeiture charge, the U.S. government is seeking forfeiture of 14 properties in Colombia and 16 domestic and international bank accounts for a total of \$4.05 million. Under the drug forfeiture charge, the U.S. government is seeking forfeiture of \$549,075 against any property derived from the proceeds of this activity.

Penalties for the narcotics offenses alleged in the indictment range from 10 years to life imprisonment and fines up to \$4 million. Penalties for the money laundering offense range from a fine of not more than \$500,000.00, or twice the value of the property involved in the transaction, whichever is greater, or imprisonment of 20 years, or both.

ICE agents in Puerto Rico and Miami, as well as the ICE Attaché offices in Colombia, Venezuela, France, and the Caribbean conducted the investigation. Other agencies participating in the investigation include the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigations Division, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, the Puerto Rico Police Department, the San Juan Municipal Police, and the Puerto Rico Bureau of Special Investigations.

The public is reminded that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial and the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Desiree Laborde-Sanfiorenzo, Deputy Chief, Narcotics Section, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Timothy Henwood.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.*