



U.S. Immigration
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SECRETARY RIDGE PLEDGES ALL-OUT FEDERAL EFFORT TO COMBAT HUMAN SMUGGLING AND RELATED VIOLENCE *Secretary Highlights Progress and Praises Local Law Enforcement for Support*



PHOENIX, AZ — Department of Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge today told law enforcement officials in Phoenix that human smuggling and the violence it generates pose a significant threat to the nation's security and his Department is determined to do whatever it takes to dismantle the criminal organizations involved. In a briefing with local and state law enforcement officials, Secretary Ridge highlighted the initial successes of *ICE Storm*, the multi-agency operation led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and applauded local agencies for their role.

"I assured our law enforcement partners here that we are committed to doing everything possible to shutdown the ruthless smuggling rings that have targeted this city," Secretary Ridge said. "The alliance of federal, local, and international law enforcement that ICE has brought together is enabling us to attack this threat on more fronts than ever before."

In the last two weeks, 18 persons have been indicted on federal hostage-taking charges connected to human smuggling. New federal sentencing enhancements ensure that smugglers who engage in hostage taking will be given stiff sentences, up to life in prison.

"This office remains committed to working closely with the law enforcement agencies involved in *ICE Storm* and will vigorously prosecute those violent perpetrators to the fullest extent of the law," said Paul Charlton, United States Attorney for Arizona. "Secretary Ridge's presence here today reflects the seriousness and importance that Homeland Security has placed on this issue."

Since the first phase of *ICE Storm* began in mid-September, 81 individuals have been arrested and charged for smuggling related crimes by federal, state, and Mexican authorities.

Ridge noted that *ICE Storm* is also making significant headway in its goal to cripple the financial infrastructure of the highly lucrative smuggling organizations. ICE's financial investigations expertise is enabling the *ICE Storm* task force to follow the money trail in ways not previously possible. Within the last two weeks, \$1.1 million dollars in smuggling proceeds have been frozen as a result of investigative efforts headed by the Arizona Attorney General, with support from ICE, the Arizona Department of Public Safety, and the Phoenix Police Department. Since the outset of *ICE Storm*, more than \$1.4 million in smuggling-related funds have been frozen or seized. Authorities are also seeking criminal forfeiture of three residences that were involved in hostage taking cases, two homes in Glendale and one in Phoenix.

At last month's news conference announcing *ICE Storm*, authorities unveiled a "Most Wanted" list, featuring fugitives linked to violent smuggling incidents in the Phoenix area. Authorities urged the public to call ICE's toll-free tip line - 1-866-DHS-2ICE – with information on those individuals or suspected smuggling activity. Secretary Ridge revealed today that since that announcement, ICE has received more than 50 calls from Phoenix-area residents on that toll-free line.

As part of *ICE Storm*, ICE has deployed 50 additional Special Agents to the Phoenix area. These resources enhance ICE's investigational capabilities and its ability to respond to local law enforcement. In addition to ICE, there are numerous federal, state, and local agencies participating in *ICE Storm*. Those entities include the United States Attorney's Office; DHS's U.S. Customs and Border Protection; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the Arizona Attorney General's Office; the Maricopa County Attorney's Office; the Arizona Department of Public Safety; the Phoenix, and Scottsdale Police Departments; and the Maricopa and Pinal County Sheriff's Offices.

As the largest investigative arm of Homeland Security, ICE brings to bear a broad array of authorities and resources that make it uniquely qualified to lead the fight against human smuggling. ICE agents combine immigration, smuggling, and financial investigative powers to attack the criminal rings from a variety of levels.

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ICE, the primary investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, was established to bring a unified focus to the enforcement of U.S. immigration and customs laws, with the principal goal of preventing violations by terrorists and other criminals who threaten the nation's security.