



U.S. Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

**MS-13 GANG MEMBERS INDICTED FOR 2016 MURDERS
OF THREE BRENTWOOD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

***13 Defendants Charged with Seven Murders, Including the 2016 Murders
of 15 Year-Old Nisa Mickens, 16 Year-Old Kayla Cuevas and 18 Year-Old Jose Pena***

A 41-count second superseding indictment was unsealed today in federal court in Central Islip, which charges thirteen MS-13 members with racketeering, seven murders, attempted murders, assaults, obstruction of justice, arson, conspiracy to distribute marijuana, and related firearms and conspiracy charges. Four of those defendants were arrested earlier this morning and will be arraigned this afternoon before United States District Judge Joseph F. Bianco at the federal courthouse in Central Islip. Additionally, during the execution of a search warrant at the home of MS-13 leaders ALEXI SAENZ, also known as "Blasty" and "Big Homie," and JAIRO SAENZ, also known as "Funny," this morning, investigators recovered an arsenal of weapons, including a loaded 9mm semi-automatic handgun, numerous rounds of ammunition, including additional 9mm, .38 caliber, .357 caliber, and other assorted rounds, machetes, a sword, a hatchet, and knives. Further, investigators recovered a quantity of marijuana packaged for resale, ledgers, and MS-13 paraphernalia.

Among the offenses added in the second superseding indictment are murder charges against A. SAENZ, J. SAENZ, SELVIN CHAVEZ, also known as "Flash," and ENRIQUE PORTILLO, also known as "Oso" and "Turkey," in connection with the murders of Brentwood High School students Nisa Mickens and Kayla Cuevas, who were killed on September 13, 2016, and murder charges against ELMER ALEXANDER LOPEZ, also known as "Smiley," "Little Smiley" and "Alex," GERMAN CRUZ, also known as "Bad Boy," and two other defendants, who are still fugitives at this time, relating to the murder of Jose Pena, who also attended Brentwood High School and was killed on June 3, 2016, but whose skeletonized remains were not recovered until October 17, 2016. Two other MS-13 members, who were juveniles at the time of the murders, have been charged with the Cuevas and Mickens murders, and a third juvenile MS-13 member has been charged with the Pena murder. By statute, those cases remain under seal at this time.

The charges were announced by Robert L. Capers, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, William F. Sweeney, Jr., Assistant Director-in-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI), Timothy D. Sini, Commissioner, Suffolk County Police Department (SCPD), and Thomas C. Krumpfer, Acting Commissioner, Nassau County Police Department (NCPD).

“The brutal murders of Nisa Mickens and Kayla Cuevas, and the savage killing of Jose Pena, allegedly committed by these defendants, exemplify the depravity of a gang whose primary mission is murder,” stated United States Attorney Capers. “As the MS-13 continues its efforts to expand and entrench itself in our communities, both by sending gang members to illegally enter the United States from Central America, and by recruiting new members from our schools and neighborhoods, this Office and the FBI’s Long Island Gang Task Force will continue our mission to dismantle the MS-13 and free our neighborhoods from the terror they cause.” Mr. Capers expressed his grateful appreciation to all the members of the FBI’s Long Island Gang Task Force.

“Stamping out gangs and the violence they bring to our neighborhoods remains a top priority for the FBI. Since 2003, the FBI’s Long Island Gang Task Force has been combining the resources of our agents and detectives who, although they are from different agencies, work together in carrying out one mission: to protect the right to live in a society free from violence. Whether you live in Brentwood or the Hamptons, you have a right to safety and security in your neighborhood. That’s why we’re here today and it’s the reason we’re not going away,” stated FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge Sweeney.

“The day Nisa Mickens and Kayla Cuevas were heinously murdered, the Suffolk County Police Department made a commitment to their families and to the residents of Brentwood that justice would be served. Today, in collaboration with the FBI and the United States Attorney’s Office, we have delivered on that promise. We have also promised to eradicate MS-13 from our streets and we remain fully committed to finishing the job. We will continue to keep the pressure on this ruthless gang and anyone who associates with them, and we will spare no resource to accomplish our objective. I want to thank every member of the Suffolk County Police Department for their steadfast determination, commitment and professionalism on this investigation and a special thank you to our partners in the FBI and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for their outstanding work on this case,” stated SCPD Commissioner Sini.

“These recent arrests in a combined multi-jurisdictional law enforcement effort should be a prime example of how these heinous murders by gang members will not go unpunished. I would like to acknowledge the exceptional investigative work which led to the arrests of these defendants and express my sincere condolences to the victims and their families,” stated NCPD Acting Commissioner Krumpfer.

The second superseding indictment adds charges against LOPEZ, who previously was charged with two attempted murders, CRUZ and two other defendants in connection with the June 3, 2016 murder of Jose Pena. As detailed in the second superseding indictment and the government’s detention letter, which was filed earlier today, the MS-13 decided to kill Pena, a member of the MS-13, because he was suspected of violating gang rules. Prior to the murder, LOPEZ, CRUZ and other members of the Freeport Locos Salvatruchas (FLS) clique of the MS-

13 held meetings where they discussed punishing Pena for the rules violations. After consulting with gang leadership in El Salvador, the FLS members agreed to murder Pena, and tasks were assigned to each of the members of the clique to carry out the plan, including obtaining weapons and a vehicle to be used in the murder. On June 3, 2016, LOPEZ and several other FLS members lured Pena into a car that was provided by CRUZ. They drove Pena to a secluded wooded area in Brentwood, where they attacked him, taking turns stabbing and slashing him with knives.

As detailed in the second superseding indictment and the government's detention letter, A. SAENZ, J. SAENZ, CHAVEZ, and PORTILLO are charged with the September 13, 2016 murders of Nisa Mickens and Kayla Cuevas. In the months leading up to the murders, Cuevas was involved in a series of disputes with members and associates of the MS-13. Approximately one week before the murders, these disputes escalated when Cuevas and several friends were involved in an altercation with MS-13 members at Brentwood High School. After that incident, the MS-13 members vowed to seek revenge against Cuevas. On the evening of September 13, 2016, CHAVEZ, A. SAENZ, J. SAENZ, PORTILLO, and other members of the Sailors Locos Salvatruchas Westside (Sailors) clique of the MS-13 agreed to hunt for rival gang members to kill. They separated into different vehicles and drove around Brentwood looking for targets. CHAVEZ, PORTILLO, and two other juvenile MS-13 members, who were riding together in one car, saw Cuevas and Mickens walking down Stahley Street. They recognized Cuevas and called A. SAENZ and J. SAENZ, the leaders of the Sailors clique, who authorized them to kill the two girls. CHAVEZ, the driver, pulled up close to the girls, then PORTILLO and the other MS-13 members jumped out of the car and attacked them with baseball bats and a machete, striking the girls numerous times in the head and body. After finishing the attack, PORTILLO and the others got back into the car and CHAVEZ drove them away. Mickens's body, which was discovered on Stahley Street shortly thereafter, sustained significant sharp force trauma to the face and blunt force trauma to the head. Cuevas's body, which was discovered the following day behind a house adjacent to where Mickens's body was found, sustained significant blunt force trauma to the head and body and lacerations.

Further, CHAVEZ, PORTILLO, A. SAENZ, J. SAENZ, and JONATHAN HERNANDEZ are all charged with conspiracy to distribute marijuana. From April 2016 to the present, the defendants sold marijuana and used the proceeds to help finance the Sailors clique's criminal operations. Specifically, the MS-13 members sold marijuana and used that money to purchase firearms and ammunition, as well as to send money to MS-13 leaders in El Salvador.

Finally, the second superseding indictment charges HERNANDEZ in connection with the October 7, 2015 assaults of a male and female that occurred on an athletic field located near the Brentwood East Elementary and Brentwood East Middle Schools. The two victims were there with a group of other individuals when HERNANDEZ and other members of the MS-13 approached and attacked them. The group ran away, except for the victims who were caught, knocked to the ground, and struck repeatedly with baseball bats and pipes. The male victim suffered a broken hand and deep lacerations to the face. The female victim suffered severe pain throughout her body where the weapons had struck her.

The underlying indictments in this case, filed on July 20, 2016 and November 15, 2016, charged defendants EDWIN AMAYA-SANCHEZ, also known as "Strong," WILLIAM

CASTELLANOS, also known as “Dizzy” and “Satanico,” JHONNY CONTRERAS, also known as “Muerte,” “Reaper” and “Conejo,” REYNALDO LOPEZ-ALVARADO, also known as “Mente,” and LOPEZ, who are all members of the MS-13, with four murders, including the May 26 and 28, 2013 murders of Derrick Mayes and Keenan Russell, the July 14, 2014 murder of Jose Lainez-Murcia, the June 30, 2015 murder of Jonathan Cardona-Hernandez, three attempted murders, as well as related firearms, accessory after the fact, obstruction of justice, and arson offenses.

This second superseding indictment is the latest in a series of federal prosecutions by the United States Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York targeting members of the MS-13, a violent international criminal organization. The MS-13’s leadership is based in El Salvador and Honduras, but the gang has thousands of members across the United States, comprised primarily of immigrants from Central America. With numerous branches, or “cliques,” the MS-13 is the largest and most violent street gang on Long Island. Since 2003, hundreds of MS-13 members, including dozens of clique leaders, have been convicted on federal felony charges in the Eastern District of New York. A majority of those MS-13 members have been convicted on federal racketeering charges for participating in murders, attempted murders and assaults. Since 2010 alone, this Office has obtained indictments charging MS-13 members with carrying out more than 35 murders in the Eastern District of New York, and has convicted dozens of MS-13 leaders and members in connection with those murders. These prosecutions are the product of investigations led by the FBI’s Long Island Gang Task Force, comprising agents and officers of the FBI, SCPD, NCPD, Nassau County Sheriff’s Department, Suffolk County Probation, Suffolk County Sheriff’s Department, and Rockville Centre Police Department.

If convicted, all of the defendants charged in the second superseding indictment face up to life in prison or the death penalty, other than CRUZ, who faces up to 10 years in prison, and HERNANDEZ, who faces up to 20 years on each of the assault counts and an additional five years for the conspiracy to distribute marijuana. The charges in the second superseding indictment are merely allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The government’s case is being handled by the Office’s Long Island Criminal Division. Assistant United States Attorneys John J. Durham, Raymond A. Tierney, and Paul G. Scotti are in charge of the prosecution.

The Defendants:

EDWIN AMAYA-SANCHEZ (“Strong”)

Age: 29

Brentwood, New York

WILLIAM CASTELLANOS (“Dizzy” and “Satanico”)

Age: 20

Central Islip, New York

SELVIN CHAVEZ (“Flash”)

Age: 19

Brentwood, New York

JHONNY CONTRERAS (“Muerte,” “Reaper” and “Conejo”)

Age: 23

Brentwood, New York

GERMAN CRUZ (“Bad Boy”)

Age: 18

Brentwood, New York

JONATHAN HERNANDEZ (“Travieso” and “Kraken”)

Age: 19

Brentwood, New York

ELMER ALEXANDER LOPEZ (“Smiley,” “Little Smiley” and “Alex”)

Age: 19

Central Islip, New York

REYNALDO LOPEZ-ALVARADO (“Mente”)

Age: 24

Brentwood, New York

ENRIQUE PORTILLO (“Oso” and “Turkey”)

Age: 19

Brentwood, New York

ALEXI SAENZ (“Blasty” and “Big Homie”)

Age: 22

Central Islip, New York

JAIRO SAENZ (“Funny”)

Age: 19

Central Islip, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 16-CR-403 (S-2)(JFB)