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Organized Crime Takedown Nets 39 Arrests of Violent Criminals, Arms Traffickers and Drug Dealers

Operation ‘Los Impuestos’ Targeted Prison Gang Calling Shots to Street Gang Associates on the Outside

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) today announced dozens of arrests resulting from a wide-ranging takedown of street gang members operating in San Diego County at the direction of the largest prison gang, known as the Mexican Mafia, which has ties to Mexico’s cartels. Many of those arrested have been involved in murders, attempted murders, robberies, arson, extortion, drug and weapons trafficking and violent assaults.

During the six-month undercover investigation, dubbed Operation “Los Impuestos,” law enforcement partners from the San Diego Police Street Gang Unit, San Diego County District Attorney’s Office Gang Unit, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco Firearms and Explosives developed evidence against 46 defendants for a variety of crimes. The investigation revealed that dozens of criminal street gang members from various gangs were being controlled and prolifically committed violent crimes, including at least one murder and two attempted murders at the behest of the Mexican Mafia. Seven of the defendants being charged are currently already in custody for other crimes.

Last Thursday, 39 defendants were arrested after law enforcement fanned out across the county in a coordinated takedown. Many of those arrested and charged were scheduled to be arraigned today at 1:30 p.m. in Department 101 of the downtown San Diego Superior Court. If convicted, the defendants are facing a wide range of possible prison sentences from three years to life terms in state prison. There are eight defendants who have been criminally charged but remain at large. Charges filed in 20 separate criminal cases include murder, conspiracy to commit murder, extortion, and firearms trafficking.

“This operation once again proves that we will not allow criminal organizations to terrorize our communities by threats or violence,” DA Stephan said. “Every person in every neighborhood deserves to be safe from crime and violence. These criminals took orders from gang bosses operating in state prison and they preyed on business owners by forcing mafia-style tax

payments. They dealt illegal drugs, committed widespread violence and trafficked weapons such as ghost guns and AR 15s. The extraordinary cooperation and expertise from our law enforcement partners has exposed the cartel bosses in prison who were calling the shots and together we put a significant dent in their criminal operation.”

The Mexican Mafia, known as “La EME,” is the largest and most established prison gang in the United States. The Mexican Mafia was initially formed in the California state penal system and has been in existence for more than 50 years. At present, the Mexican Mafia operates both in the California State prison system, as well as in other states, and in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The prison gang controls and utilizes Southern California gang members who are both in custody and out of custody for their criminal enterprises. These gang members pay tribute to and engage in criminal activity with the Mexican Mafia.

Operation “Los Impuestos” revealed that the prison gang was using a vast network of gang members throughout San Diego County and its ties to international drug trafficking organizations to collect extortion payments or “taxes” from legal and illegal businesses, traffic drugs and firearms, intimidate witnesses and victims in the community, and to carry out violent acts including numerous beatings, shootings, and murders. The criminal acts happened all over San Diego with much of it centered downtown, in Barrio Logan, City Heights and in South San Diego.

In one case, it was uncovered that an order was given to blow up a business with a grenade that had stopped paying it’s ‘tax.’ Two grenades were seized during the operation. Other businesses were hit with Molotov cocktails and robbed, including illegal gambling dens.

On multiple occasions during the operation, violent acts that were about to be committed were prevented by law enforcement.

“This operation is the perfect example of how good, thorough policework keeps our communities safe and holds violent criminals accountable,” said San Diego Police Chief Scott Wahl. “The San Diego Police Department and our partners stand strong in our commitment to public safety and will continue to dedicate the necessary resources to bringing these violent criminals to justice.”

Guns and drugs were confiscated during the operation, including:

Weapons	Amount
Handguns	21
Rifles	23
Shotguns	4
Glock Switches	1
Grenades	2
Narcotics	Amount
Methamphetamine	75 lbs.
Cocaine	1.66 lbs.
Fentanyl	59.5 lbs.
M30 Fentanyl Pills	4,000 +

“Drug-related violent crime undermines public safety, leaving fear and uncertainty in its wake,” said DEA Special Agent in Charge Brian Clark. “The conclusion of this investigation marks the

end to a deep-rooted criminal network operating in San Diego County. DEA and our partners will relentlessly pursue those who disregard the law to ensure San Diego is a safe place to live.”

A number of additional agencies assisted in the operation, including the U.S. Attorney’s Office, the San Diego Sheriff’s Office and the National City Police Department.

Deputy District Attorney Robert Eacret is overseeing the prosecutions and Deputy District Attorneys Martin Doyle, William Hopkins, Mary Naoom, Melissa Mack, and MaryLouise Wright are also prosecuting some of the 20 criminal cases that resulted from the operation.

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About the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office

The San Diego County DA’s Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.

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