



**KINGS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY CHARLES J. HYNES,
IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT NEW YORK ACTING
SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE SALVATORE DALESSANDRO, DRUG
ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE JOHN
P. GILBRIDE AND WATERFRONT COMMISSION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
THOMAS DIMARIA ANNOUNCE INDICTMENT OF SEVEN PANAMANIAN DRUG
TRAFFICKERS**

TRIED TO SMUGGLE \$10 MILLION IN COCAINE INTO NEW YORK

Brooklyn, January 10, 2008 – Kings County District Attorney Charles J. Hynes, Immigration and Customs Enforcement New York Acting Special Agent in Charge Salvatore Dalessandro, Drug Enforcement Administration Special Agent in Charge John P. Gilbride and Waterfront Commission Executive Director Thomas DiMaria today announced the indictment of seven people involved in a multi-million-dollar conspiracy to smuggle cocaine into New York from Panama, aboard container ships docking in Howland Hook, Staten Island, for distribution along the East Coast.

"The international narco-traffickers charged in this indictment sought to poison our neighborhoods and streets with cocaine and like all drug dealers, they will be brought to justice," said District Attorney Hynes. "I'd like to thank the DEA's Drug Enforcement Task Force, ICE, and the Waterfront Commission for their hard work and cooperation in this investigation."

Working on information that members of an organized, cocaine smuggling conspiracy were looking for a corrupt longshoreman to help unload shipments of narcotics in a New York port, a Detective Investigator from the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office went undercover to infiltrate the organization. Posing as a longshoreman with the ability to unload contraband from container ships without alerting law enforcement, the undercover was able to intercept approximately 75 pounds of cocaine, worth \$10 million, in three shipments.

In order to test the undercover and his ability to unload the contraband without being detected, the smugglers in Panama first sent a Panamanian newspaper and a hat, stashed aboard a container ship. The indictment charges that in three later shipments the defendants transported cocaine, believing the longshoreman was passing it on to members of the criminal enterprise, who then delivered it to wholesale narcotics distributors along the East Coast.

The drugs were hidden so deeply in the enormous container ships that for one shipment, the defendants provided the undercover Detective Investigator a map to find them.

The ships navigated the Panama Canal en route from China to New York and then Virginia, but in the Panamanian port city of Manzanillo, smugglers secretly loaded them with cocaine.

Six of the defendants have been indicted on charges of Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance in the First Degree and Conspiracy in the Second Degree. They face up to 45 years in prison if convicted. The seventh defendant was charged with Endangering the Welfare of a Child for bringing her seven-year-old child along to pick up more than 12 pounds of cocaine.

DEA Special Agent in Charge Gilbride said, "Transnational drug crime is a threat to the safety and security of our communities. The illegal enterprise that this organization operated was able to smuggle cocaine from Panama to the streets of New York aboard commercial vessels without being detected up until now. The DEA is committed to working with our local and international partners to disrupt and dismantle these dangerous criminal organizations and make our cities safer."

Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor Chief J. Kevin McGowan said, "The police division at the Waterfront Commission has been aggressively investigating internal conspiracies on the waterfront since its creation in 1953. This was a creative undercover undertaking by the Commission detectives and Detective Investigators from the Brooklyn DA's office. Over the last three years, we have arrested more than 53 people who were tied to internal conspiracies within the port district of New York and New Jersey."

ICE Special Agent in Charge Dalessandro said, "Today, we dismantled a major drug trafficking organization and its distribution pipeline. The illegal drugs that were trafficked by this organization threatened the public safety and the welfare of New York City and its communities. ICE will continue to work with its law enforcement partners to investigate these crimes and bring these criminals to justice. Together we will make our communities a safer place for everyone."

Waterfront Commission Executive Director De Maria said, "Once again, the collaborative effort of the Kings County District Attorney's Office and the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor has resulted in bringing seven perpetrators to justice who sought to use the Port of New York as an avenue for their illegal activity. I commend Assistant Chief McGowan and our Waterfront Commission Detectives for their excellent work along with Brooklyn D.A. Hynes and his fine investigators who, working together, rooted out and destroyed this illegal internal conspiracy which sought to bring cocaine in from Panama for sale and distribution on the streets of Brooklyn. The Waterfront Commission, and our many partners in Federal, State and local law

enforcement, stands ever vigilant to deter, combat and eradicate criminal activity in our great Port.”

The New York Drug Enforcement Task Force, comprised of DEA Special Agents, NYPD Detectives and New York State Police Investigators, worked on the case, as did the DEA's Panama Country Office.

The case was investigated by Detective Investigator Edwin Murphy, Detective Investigator John Beale, Detective Investigator Kevin McAleese, Detective Investigator William Petite, Supervising Investigator James Russell, Supervising Investigator Joseph Piraino, Supervising Investigator Shaun Winter, Deputy Chief Investigator Al Lombardo, and Assistant Chief Investigator George Terra. Joseph Ponzi is Chief of Investigators.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant District Attorneys Maria Haymandou and Lawrence Oh. Suzanne Corhan is Chief of the Narcotics Division. Michael Vecchione is Chief of the Rackets Division.

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