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DA Announces Charges Against Violent Kidnapping and Murder Crew

Cartel-Related Group Responsible for Nine Murders, Body Dumping

San Diego County District Attorney [Bonnie M. Dumanis](#) today announced a two-year investigation led by the DA's Office has resulted in a 22 count indictment of 17 individuals connected to a kidnapping and murder crew operating in San Diego known as *Los Palillos*. The indictment includes the charging of nine murders that occurred in San Diego County, all of which involve multiple special circumstances including torture.

"This rogue group of individuals is responsible for a string of brutal murders and kidnappings that demonstrate the ugly reality of cross-border violence," said DA Dumanis. "Thanks to extraordinary cooperation from several law enforcement agencies and the dedication of District Attorney Investigators and prosecutors, we have essentially dismantled this dangerous organization."

The investigation was carried out over a two-year period with assistance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), California Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), San Diego Police Department, San Diego County Sheriff's Department and Chula Vista Police Department.

"Today's indictment demonstrates the cohesive nature of law enforcement agencies in San Diego. It is because of this long-standing cooperation that we were able to effectively disrupt this organization's violent, disturbing, criminal activity," said FBI Special Agent-in-Charge Keith Slotter. "The FBI and our partners will continue to aggressively pursue any group engaged in such activities. We are, indeed, very fortunate to have men and women at all levels of government so committed to the safety of this community."

The investigation included the largest DNA analysis performed by the San Diego Police Department crime lab due to the amount of physical items seized and amount of suspects processed.

"These are very significant cases involving individuals who chose to commit heinous acts. I'm very proud of the work our agencies have done together in the effort to arrest and prosecute these people," said San Diego Police Chief William Lansdowne.

The nine murder victims were lured to houses rented by members of *Los Palillos*, or abducted and held at those houses before eventually being murdered. The bodies of seven of the victims were found by residents after being dumped in neighborhoods in the cities of Chula Vista, San Diego and Bonita. The bodies of two murder victims were dissolved in acid in May of 2007 at a rented house in the 6500 block of Garber Street in San Diego.

Over a two month period, evidence was presented to a Grand Jury which returned the indictments on August 6th. In addition to the murder charges, the grand jury also indicted defendants on charges that included two other shootings, and the attempted murder of a Chula Vista police officer and several kidnappings of victims whose families paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in ransom.

More than 120 witnesses testified to the Grand Jury about violent incidents in which members of *Los Palillos* often impersonated police and used handguns and tasers to assault, rob, kidnap, and often times kill their victims.

The grand jurors also found that *Los Palillos* qualifies as a criminal street gang under the California Penal Code and that all 22 felonies charged were committed to benefit the gang. The finding adds additional allegations to the indictment that increase prison sentences. *Los Palillos* consisted of U.S. and Mexican citizens who previously had ties to the Arellano-Felix Organization in Tijuana but relocated across the border into San Diego. This rogue crew then began trafficking methamphetamine and marijuana, and committed numerous violent crimes in San Diego County.

Some members of the ring were arrested in June of 2007, when law enforcement located a kidnapping victim being held at 1539 Point Dume Court in Chula Vista. FBI SWAT operations rescued the 32-year old kidnapping victim (a business man living in Chula Vista) and apprehended five kidnappers. Two leaders of *Los Palillos* were convicted of kidnapping for ransom in December of 2008 and sentenced to life without the possibility of parole in January 2009. Other kidnappers have since pleaded guilty and two remain set for trial.

In the new indictment, *Los Palillos* leader Jorge Rojas-Lopez is charged with nine murders with numerous special circumstances, making him eligible for the death penalty. Fourteen other defendants are charged with at least one murder with special circumstances also making them eligible for the death penalty. Nine of the 17 charged individuals are already in custody on other charges.

The District Attorney's Office is seeking the public's assistance in locating the remaining eight defendants who are currently out of custody. CrimeStoppers is offering up to a \$1,000 reward for information that leads to their arrest. Anyone with information is asked to call 888-580-8477.

The defendants in custody will be arraigned today at 2:30 p.m. in Department 11 of the San Diego County Superior Court downtown.

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