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**COLOMBIAN COCAINE KINGPIN SENTENCED TO THIRTY YEARS
IN PRISON ON NARCOTICS AND MONEY LAUNDERING CHARGES**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and JOHN P. GILBRIDE, Special Agent-in-Charge of the New York Office of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"), announced that MANUEL FELIPE SALAZAR-ESPINOSA, a/k/a "Hoover," designated by the Justice Department as one of the world's most significant drug kingpins, was sentenced this morning to a term of thirty years in prison on narcotics and money laundering charges. The sentence was imposed by United States District Judge LEWIS A. KAPLAN in Manhattan federal court.

SALAZAR-ESPINOSA had been extradited from Colombia in August 2006, after being arrested there by Colombian authorities the previous year. In June 2007, he was tried before a federal jury in Manhattan on cocaine importation conspiracy and money laundering conspiracy charges, and convicted on all counts. According to documents filed in this case and the proof at trial:

SALAZAR-ESPINOSA conspired with Mexican cocaine cartel leaders to import ton-quantities of Colombian cocaine, through Mexico, to the United States on a weekly basis, and also assisted in the laundering of \$12 million to \$14 million in narcotics proceeds per week from 2002 to 2005. SALAZAR-ESPINOSA had been engaged in the international cocaine trade since the 1980s, and was arrested in Colombia in 2005 while planning a 1.3-ton cocaine shipment destined for the United States. That shipment, which was concealed in the arm of a crane, was seized in Panama in July 2005. When he was arrested, SALAZAR-ESPINOSA was also planning another shipment of 5 tons of cocaine that was to be flown from Colombia to Mexico and then transported to New York City.

Prior to his arrest and conviction, SALAZAR-ESPINOSA

had been designated by the United States Government as a Consolidated Priority Organization Target ("CPOT"). The CPOT list, compiled by the Department of Justice in 2002 and updated annually, targets the world's most significant command and control organizations involved in the narcotics and money laundering trade.

Mr. GARCIA praised the investigative efforts of the DEA's New York Drug Enforcement Task Force -- which includes agents and officers of the DEA, New York City Police Department, and New York State Police -- and the DEA's Bogota Country Office and Merida Resident Office, and thanked the United States Marshals Service for its work in effectuating the extradition. Mr. GARCIA also expressed his gratitude to the Colombian Attorney General's Office and Colombian National Police, as well as the Colombian Department of Administrative Security, for their cooperation in the investigation, and foreign law enforcement authorities in Panama and Mexico for their assistance in this case.

The terms of SALAZAR-ESPINOSA's extradition from Colombia required the United States to seek a sentence of a term of years, rather than a life sentence. In sentencing SALAZAR-ESPINOSA, who is 56 years of age, to a thirty-year term, Judge KAPLAN noted that SALAZAR-ESPINOSA came from an upper-middle class background, and "made a conscious decision to become a major narcotics trafficker for pretty much the rest of his life." Judge KAPLAN noted that SALAZAR-ESPINOSA committed his crimes "not because he knew of no other life, ... but because it was an economic proposition, it was a way to make even more money, vast amounts of money," and that SALAZAR-ESPINOSA was a "rational economic actor" in that he attempted to insulate himself from criminal responsibility in the United States by working with others who would complete the importation of the cocaine SALAZAR-ESPINOSA conspired to import. Judge KAPLAN characterized this as an "egregious miscalculation," and also found significant the "sheer size of the defendant's activities," including the "huge volume of drugs" and narcotics proceeds for which the defendant was responsible, and found that the defendant posed a "major recidivism risk" since "the only life the defendant knows is international drug trafficking." Judge KAPLAN concluded by noting the defendant's age, and that "consistent with the spirit" of the Government's assurances to the Colombian government not to seek a life sentence, he declined to impose a sentence that "inevitably would be a life sentence."

Mr. GARCIA stated: "Today's sentence puts an end to the 20-year criminal career of Hoover Salazar, one of the world's

most significant cocaine kingpins, who moved tons of cocaine and tens of millions of dollars in drug money. Salazar could not have been stopped without the outstanding work of DEA agents in New York and abroad, and our law enforcement partners in Colombia, Panama and Mexico."

Mr. GILBRIDE stated: "For years, Manuel 'Hoover' Salazar-Espinosa operated a drug trafficking organization with impunity. Today's sentencing proves that international law enforcement can identify and bring to justice individuals who think they will never have to pay a price for their illegal activity. DEA stands firmly with our local and international law enforcement partners in this battle against drugs. From the kingpins to the street dealers our combined goal is to dismantle these drug trafficking organizations and put them out of service."

Assistant United States Attorneys IRIS LAN, ERIC SNYDER, GURUANJAN SAHNI and ANIRUDH BANSAL are in charge of the prosecution.

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