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News Releases

MAY 10, 2011 GRAND RAPIDS, MI

3 illegal aliens sentenced in fraudulent identification ring

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. - Three Mexican nationals were sentenced Monday on charges of trafficking identification documents and possession of document-making implements following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

The three men: Eddie Castilla-Lugo, 37, Israel Armendariz-Becerra, 41, and Miguel Merlos-Gonzalez, 32, were all sentenced to federal prison for their crimes. Castilla-Lugo received 63 months, Armendariz-Becerra received 24 months, and Merlos-Gonzalez will serve 21 months. They will be deported following their sentences.

The investigation revealed that defendants sold high-quality fraudulent documents from an apartment they lived in.

"Authentic and legitimately possessed and utilized identity documents are critical components to many of the systems designed to protect the public, ensure compliance with our laws, and enhance our security. The manufacturing and selling of fraudulent identity documents like those in this case poses a very real threat," said Brian M. Moskowitz, special agent in charge of ICE HSI in Michigan and Ohio. "Combating this threat by shutting down the criminal organizations involved in these types of schemes remains a high priority for HSI."

The case resulted in a total of five convictions. Defendants Jose Reyes-Gonzalez, 34, and Eduardo Lopez-Sosa, 22, who are also citizens of Mexico and illegal aliens, pled guilty to the conspiracy charge in plea-agreements with the Justice Department in late 2010. In February and March 2011, Reyes-Gonzalez and Lopez-Sosa was sentenced to 33 months and 15 months, respectively, in federal prison.

The case was investigated by agents of HSI and prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Hagen W. Frank.

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

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