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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Operation 'En Fuego' Dismantles Massive Human Smuggling Organization

(Phoenix, Ariz. – Dec. 12, 2008) Attorney General Terry Goddard today announced the break-up of a major Phoenix-based smuggling organization and indictment of 35 individuals on felony charges relating to human smuggling.

The indictment is the result of a seven-month investigation by the Arizona Financial Crimes Task Force, comprised of the Arizona Attorney General's Office, Phoenix Police Department, Arizona Department of Public Safety and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, along with the U.S. Border Patrol.

The Palacios-Alfaro smuggling organization was led by Rosalio Palacios-Alfaro, aka "Chali," 26, of Phoenix, and Hector Moises Ibarra Ramirez, aka "Guero," 28, of Phoenix. Both men are Mexican citizens living in Phoenix illegally.

The organization is believed to have been active for approximately two years. It allegedly contracted with multiple smuggling organizations to transport 40 to 90 undocumented immigrants per week from Phoenix to their final destinations throughout the United States.

"This operation has smashed a violent cartel," Goddard said. "By targeting organized criminals smuggling human cargo, drugs and weapons, we are working to secure our border and keep Arizona communities safe. I will continue to use criminal prosecution, asset forfeiture and all other legal means to combat these violent organizations."

According to investigators, the organization transported four to six van-loads of 10 to 15 people weekly. It charged smugglers \$700 per person to provide transportation, generating as much as \$7,000 to \$10,500 in cash per van load for their services. Vans allegedly traveled in a steady rotation with drivers, often taking non-stop round trips to and from East Coast cities.

"The best way to impact immigration and, at the same time, make our community safer is to go after felons and attack these cartels from the top," said Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon. "I again applaud the results that are achieved through partnerships and cooperation."

Phoenix Public Safety Manager Jack Harris said, "Border violence must be stopped. This organization was identified as the result of a kidnapping/homicide investigation that occurred earlier this year. The Phoenix Police Department and our partners are committed to eliminating

this violent criminal activity, which occurs far too frequently on our streets. We will continue to aggressively target those individuals and organizations who think they can commit these crimes in our community."

Coyote smugglers typically charge \$2,500 to smuggle an individual from Mexico to his or her destination city in the U.S. Out of this fee, "border organizers" pay a variety of sub-contractors along the route, including drop house operators, bank account holders and load drivers.

Each of these services had a fee which is paid by the border organizer for each person smuggled. The border organizers are typically responsible for arranging the collection of money from sponsor families as each individual is smuggled into the United States.

In this investigation, the border organizers used money transmitters to collect an initial payment of \$1,800 per person to illegally smuggle migrants from Mexico to Phoenix-area drop houses. The Palacios-Alfaro organization allegedly contracted to transport undocumented immigrants from these drop houses to their final destination, at which time the driver collected a \$700 transportation fee from each sponsor family. The drivers were paid \$100 per person, and the remainder was carried back to Palacios-Alfaro.

"The DPS financial crimes unit worked very hard on this investigation. It was an honor for us to be part of this team. Our detectives specialize in tracking money used by drug and human smuggling cartels in Arizona. It's good to see the large number of arrests and know it will help make our communities a bit safer as a result," said Roger Vanderpool, Director of the Arizona Department of Public Safety

"This multi-agency probe has dealt a death blow to a ruthless criminal organization that was a major player in Arizona's human smuggling trade," said Matthew Allen, Special Agent in Charge for the ICE Office of Investigations in Arizona. "Make no mistake, by joining forces and pooling our resources, authorities and expertise, we are making it increasingly difficult for these kinds of illegal enterprises to operate in this state and that is welcome news for everyone but the smugglers. For ICE, attacking and dismantling these violent criminal organizations continues to be a top enforcement priority."

Operation "En Fuego," began in June 2008 as a result of a separate investigation into the kidnapping/homicide of another coyote smuggler. It concluded Tuesday with a round-up that resulted in the arrest of 12 of the 35 individuals charged in this case.

The charges against the defendants include participating in a criminal syndicate, illegally conducting an enterprise, money laundering, as well as conspiracy to commit illegal use of a wire or electronic communication, selling dangerous drugs and narcotic drugs and/or smuggling human beings for profit. The defendants arrested Tuesday, all but two of whom are in this country illegally, include:

- **Rosalio Palacios-Alfaro**, aka "Chali," 26, of Phoenix, in this country illegally.
- **Hector Moises Ibarra Ramirez**, aka "Guero," 28, of Phoenix, in this country illegally.
- **Paul Castillon**, 28, of Phoenix.
- **Arely Morales Jimenez**, 24, of Phoenix, in this country illegally.

- **Luis Esteban Arellano-Andrade**, aka “Jarocho,” 34, of Phoenix, in this country illegally.
- **Israel Ibarra Ramirez**, aka “Fino,” 26, of Phoenix, in this country illegally.
- **Thalia Vega Solis**, 18, of Phoenix, in this country illegally.
- **Wilfredo Rodriguez Tapanes**, aka “Cuba,” 42, of Phoenix.
- **Angel Hernandez Aguilar**, aka “Culebra,” 26, of Phoenix, in this country illegally.
- **Kenia Martinez Rodriguez**, 31, of Phoenix, in this country illegally.
- **Frey Bersain Dominguez**, aka “Frai,” 31, of Phoenix, in this country illegally.
- **Limber Espinoza Dominguez**, aka “Linber,” 19, of Phoenix, in this country illegally.

Since June 2008, Operation “En Fuego” has led to the discovery and closure of five drop houses and the detention of 86 undocumented immigrants who have been turned over to ICE for deportation. Seizures made during Tuesday’s round-up include \$39,000 in U.S. currency, 15 vehicles and an SKS Assault rifle.

Goddard was joined for today’s announcement by Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon, Phoenix Public Safety Manager Jack Harris, Immigration and Customs Enforcement Deputy Special Agent in Charge Troy Henley and Department of Public Safety Chief of Criminal Investigations David Denlinger.

This case is the result of an investigation by the Phoenix Police Department, Department of Public Safety, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Investigations Division through the Arizona Financial Crimes Task Force, as well as the U.S. Border Patrol.

Assistant Attorney General Ted Campagnolo is prosecuting this case. A copy of the indictment is available on the Attorney General’s Web site, www.azag.gov.

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