

United States Department of Justice

**For Immediate Release**

September 3, 2010 **United States Attorney's Office**  
**District of Arizona**

**Drug Kingpin Sentenced to 27 Years in Prison - Headed Drug Trafficking Organization Component of Sinaloa Cartel Linked to Violent Drug Trade**

TUCSON, AZ—Carlos Molinares-Nunez, 37, aka “Caliche,” was sentenced yesterday in federal court in Tucson to 27 years in prison and ordered to forfeit to the United States \$4,000,000 as well as thousands of dollars worth of property, vehicles, and jewelry seized in the United States.

Molinares-Nunez was indicted on November 21, 2006 and charged with continuing criminal enterprise and conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute 1000 kilograms or more of marijuana.

From September of 2001 continuing through December of 2006, Molinares-Nunez organized and directed the activities of a large and sophisticated drug smuggling organization from his home and headquarters in Naco, Sonora, Mexico. Eventually, he ended up controlling the entire drug smuggling corridor in his area. The organization has been linked to violent activity in Mexico and Molinares-Nunez had even fled to the U.S. to avoid assassination.

His organization utilized sophisticated radio communications and observation equipment to keep their load drivers informed about the presence of law enforcement vehicles, so that they could cross into the United States without fear of interception. Vehicles were purchased under straw buyers’ names to transport the marijuana into and through the United States and several of these vehicles, carrying 1000 pounds each of marijuana, would be directed into the United States each week.

More than 30,000 kilograms of marijuana were successfully crossed into the United States and the defendant’s efforts generated millions of dollars in profit.

Molinares-Nunez pleaded guilty to two counts of continuing criminal enterprise and conspiracy on June 5, 2009 in a plea agreement that required forfeiture of all his seized assets and provided for a range of sentencing from 240 months up to 360 months.

“Caliche was a key figure in the violent drug trade of the Sinaloa Cartel. With this sentencing his individual organization has been dismantled and destroyed,” said U.S. Attorney Dennis Burke.

His co-defendants, including Luis Alfonso Carillo-Landavazo, Luis Carlos Quijada-Soto, Ramona Contreras, Monica Beltran-Guillan and Benjamin Ulloa, Jr., indicted in a separate case, have been sentenced by the same court.

On April 15, 2004, Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation Operation VANQUISH was formed with Special Agents from Immigration and Customs

Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), with assistance from the Bisbee Police Department, to target a violent, cross-border drug trafficking organization identified as the MDTO. The MDTO was a sophisticated drug smuggling organization that possessed equipment that was used to monitor U.S. Law Enforcement communications.

The prosecution was handled by David A. Kern, Assistant United States Attorney for the District of Arizona, in Tucson.

CASE NUMBER: CR 06-1955-TUC-JMR

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