

United States Department of Justice

**For Immediate Release
United States Attorney's Office
Central District of California**

**Federal Racketeering Indictment Charges 88 Members of Notorious
Northeast Los Angeles Street Gang - Five Members of Avenues Street Gang
Charged in Murder of Los Angeles County Sheriff's Deputy - RICO Case
alleges Mexican Mafia-led Attempts to Reorganize Avenues after 2008
Federal Indictment Dismantled Gang's Lucrative Drew Street Clique**

Eighty-eight members and associates of the Avenues street gang in northeast Los Angeles have been named in a wide-ranging federal racketeering indictment unsealed this morning that alleges a host of crimes, including the August 2008 murder of Los Angeles Sheriff's Deputy Juan Escalante.

This morning, during a massive operation involving approximately 1,300 federal, state and local law enforcement agents, 45 defendants were arrested on criminal charges in the racketeering indictment. Thirty-three of the defendants named in the indictment were already in custody. Authorities continue to search for 10 of the defendants named in the indictment. Additionally, five people were arrested on state criminal charges and parole violations. Therefore, a total of 83 people are now in custody as a result of the year-long investigation into the Avenues.

According to the 222-page indictment returned by a federal grand jury last Thursday and unsealed this morning, members and associates of the Avenues are part of a criminal enterprise that engaged in a host of criminal acts, including murders, attempted murders, narcotics trafficking, robberies, extortions, money laundering and witness intimidation. At the center of the racketeering case are allegations that the Mexican Mafia sought to reorganize the Avenues and regain power the street gang lost after a federal indictment last year targeted the Drew Street clique of the gang (see: <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/cac/pressroom/pr2008/088.html>). The indictment discusses numerous conversations and meetings between incarcerated Mexican Mafia leaders and emissaries of the Avenues where gang business is discussed. Members of the Mexican Mafia and the Avenues also plotted to smuggle drugs and cell phones into California prisons and jails, according to the indictment.

“No matter how many times gangs like the Mexican Mafia and the Avenues seek to reassert control through intimidation, we will do what it takes to combat that intimidation, and ensure that residents need not live their lives in fear,” said Acting United States Attorney George S. Cardona.

Los Angeles Police Chief William J. Bratton stated: “This morning's operation demonstrated not only a continuing commitment to this area, but an ability to foster and maintain long-term relationships with diverse communities and law enforcement agencies. The satisfaction comes when these neighborhoods spring back to life.”

Today's operation caps an investigation conducted by the Los Angeles HIDTA (High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area) Task Force and the Los Angeles Police Department. The investigation began last summer and greatly expanded following the August 2, 2008 murder of Deputy Escalante. The Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office previously charged four Avenues members with that murder.

In addition to the murders and other violent acts, the indictment alleges that the gang "is continually engaged in" the distribution of narcotics, such as crack cocaine, methamphetamine and heroin. Avenues leaders control drug distribution by providing "street-level" amounts – typically a few grams of crack cocaine – to numerous gang members and associates and then collecting extortion payments – commonly called "taxes" or "rent" – from the sellers of the drugs, according to the indictment.

"For too long, these drug dealers have poisoned our streets and put fear into innocent people across our communities," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Timothy Landrum. "Today's arrests dismantle this drug mob and should significantly impact drug-related crime in the communities where these organizations operated."

The indictment charges 20 of the defendants with conspiracy to launder money, specifically a portion of the "taxes" collected by the Avenues gang leaders that was paid to imprisoned Mexican Mafia members by depositing funds into their prison bank accounts.

"In addition to the seizure and forfeiture of their ill-gotten gains, those members of the Avenues gang that dealt with the collection, delivery or deposit of extortionate tax payments, or used those illegal proceeds in furtherance of the Avenues gang's narcotics trafficking, have been charged with money laundering - a charge that carries up to 20 years in prison," said Leslie P. DeMarco, Special Agent in Charge of IRS- Criminal Investigation's Los Angeles Field Office. During the course of the investigation, 33 firearms were seized, including nine guns that were seized this morning.

"ATF will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to rid our neighborhoods of violent gang members," said John D'Angelo, Acting Special Agent in Charge of ATF's Los Angeles Field Division. "We are using our expertise to trace and ballistically test each firearm to determine their possible connection to other crimes."

As a result of the charges contained in the racketeering indictment, each of the 88 defendants faces a sentence of up to life in prison, and each faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in federal prison, where there is no parole.

Robert Schoch, special agent in charge for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Investigations in Los Angeles, stated: "Today's joint operation has dealt a serious blow to one of the most ruthless and dangerous street gangs operating here in the Los Angeles area. Law enforcement in Los Angeles is united in its resolve to attack and neutralize the gang threat. Today's enforcement action is another dramatic indication of the headway we're making to take back our streets. The days when gangs like this could hold entire neighborhoods hostage to fear are over. Now it is gang members who should be afraid."

The defendants arrested during this morning's operation will be making their initial appearances in United States District Court beginning this afternoon and continuing into tomorrow.

An indictment contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

In conjunction with the arrests made today, the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office today is filing nuisance abatement lawsuits against the owners of three properties where the Avenues are known to operate. The lawsuits are being filed by the City Attorney's Project T.O.U.G.H. (Taking Out Urban Gang Headquarters) section. The lawsuits will seek a preliminary injunction against the owner of each property and will request extensive physical and managerial improvements, as well as stay-away orders for known gang members, who are also named in the lawsuits.

The criminal investigation into the Avenues is the product of a year-long investigation by the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force, which is made up of agents and officers from federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. The HIDTA group that conducted the investigation is made up of agents and officers from the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, IRS - Criminal Investigation, the Ontario Police Department, the Riverside Police Department, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department and the Riverside County Sheriff's Department.

Assisting in today's operation were the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the United States Marshals Service; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Glendale Police Department; the California Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections; the Los Angeles County Probation Department; the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services; and the Los Angeles City Fire Department.

Prior to the two racketeering indictments that targeted members of Drew Street and the Avenues gang as a whole, federal authorities prosecuted several members of the Avenues on civil rights charges for assaulting and murdering African-Americans