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**D.A. BROWN: MURDER SUSPECT EXTRADITED FROM ECUADOR ARRAIGNED  
IN QUEENS IN 2004 FATAL SHOOTING OF OFF-DUTY CORRECTION OFFICER**

*Faces 25 Years to Life in Prison*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, joined by New York City Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly and United States Marshal for the Southern District of New York Joseph R. Guccione, announced today that a 23-year-old former Flushing resident has been extradited from Ecuador and arraigned on second-degree murder and other charges in connection with the shooting death of an off-duty New York City correction officer at a Queens hotel in December 2004.

District Attorney Brown said, "While justice may have been delayed by the defendant's flight to Ecuador, it has not been denied. The life of a New York City correction officer came to an abrupt end because of the defendant's alleged mindless gun-related violence. The case, which underscores our commitment to remain vigilant in the fight to rid the streets of Queens County of illegal weapons, will be vigorously prosecuted."

Police Commissioner Kelly said, "Saravanos could run to Ecuador, but he couldn't hide there. I want to commend the detectives, prosecutors, and our Federal and overseas partners for making his capture possible."

U.S. Marshal Guccione said, "Saravanos thought Ecuador was a safe haven, but because of the tireless efforts of the investigators from the NY/NJ Regional Fugitive Task Force, Saravanos has been brought to New York to face justice."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as George Saravanos (a.k.a. Victor Vargus, a.k.a. Blaze), 23, formerly of 35-74 161<sup>st</sup> Street in Flushing. Saravanos, who was taken into custody twelve days ago by Deputy United States Marshals at a hospital in Guayaquil, Ecuador, where he was being treated for multiple gunshot wounds suffered in an unrelated incident, was arraigned today before Queens Supreme Court Justice Robert J. Hanophy on a four-count indictment charging him with second-degree murder, second- and third-degree criminal possession of a weapon and tampering with physical evidence. The defendant, who faces 25 years to life in prison if convicted, was ordered held without bail and to return to court on January 14, 2008.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the criminal charges, off-duty New York City correction officer Robert Ross, 39, had just attended a party at the Sheraton LaGuardia East Hotel in Flushing when he was approached in the hotel during the pre-dawn hours of Saturday, December 4, 2004,

by the defendant, who had also attended the party and was allegedly planning to rob him. It is alleged that when Ross identified himself as a correction officer and displayed his shield, the defendant fatally shot him in the groin. Following the shooting, Saravanos allegedly disposed of the gun at the hotel.

It is further alleged that, in 2005, authorities learned that Saravanos's father, Andoneos Saravanos, 46, also of 35-64 161<sup>st</sup> Street in Flushing, was wiring money to Ecuador. On December 20, 2005, Saravanos's father was arrested and charged with first- and second-degree hindering prosecution. According to the criminal complaint filed in the case, the elder Saravanos made statements to the police in which he admitted that several hours after the shooting, he picked up his son at their Flushing residence and transported him to Atlantic City, New Jersey, where he rented a room for the night for both of them before proceeding South by car the following day with his son. On October 2, 2007, Andoneos Saravanos pleaded guilty to first-degree hindering prosecution before Queens Supreme Court Justice James P. Griffin and was sentenced the following month to five years' probation.

The investigation was conducted by NYPD Detectives Joseph Marotta and Edward Murray, of the Regional Fugitive Task Force, which is under the supervision of Chief Joseph J. Reznick, and the overall supervision of Chief of Detectives George F. Brown, and by Deputy U.S. Marshal Manny Puri under the supervision of Supervisory Inspector Edward McMahon.

Assistant District Attorney Jeneen Wunder handled today's arraignment. Assistant District Attorney Barry S. Weinrib will be prosecuting the case, which will be supervised by the District Attorney's Homicide Trials Bureau, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Brad A. Leventhal, Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Charles A. Testagrossa and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Daniel A. Saunders.

It should be noted that an indictment is merely an accusation and that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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