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Release # 116-2009
www.queensda.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, JUNE 18, 2009

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**MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER CHARGED IN CRITICAL BURNING
OF SIX-YEAR-OLD GIRL DURING ALLEGED VOODOO RITUAL**

Child Suffered Burns To 25 Percent Of Her Body

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that the mother and grandmother of a six-year-old girl have been charged with participating in a voodoo ritual earlier this year at their residence during which the mother used an accelerant to set the child on fire. The youngster suffered life-threatening burns over 25 percent of her body.

District Attorney Brown said, "During the performance of a Haitian voodoo practice known as 'Loa,' the child's mother is alleged to have intentionally poured an accelerant over her young daughter's body, causing her to be engulfed in flames. Despite the child's cries for help and the severity of her injuries, both defendants are accused of failing to seek immediate medical attention for the child. Instead, they allegedly washed her down with cold water and placed her in bed, where she was fortunately discovered the following evening by another relative who insisted that the child be taken to the hospital. The child has suffered permanent scarring – both physically and emotionally."

The District Attorney identified the defendants as Marie Lauradin, 29, and Sylvénie Thessier, 70, both of 89-26 219th Street in the Queens Village section of Queens. The defendants are awaiting arraignment in Queens Criminal Court. Lauradin is charged with first-degree assault and endangering the welfare of a child and Thessier is charged with first-degree reckless endangerment and endangering the welfare of a child. If convicted, Lauradin faces up to 25 years in prison and Thessier faces up to seven years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the charges, six-year-old Frantzcia Saintil was admitted to the William Randolph Hearst Burn Center at New York Presbyterian Hospital on February 6, 2009, with second- and third-degree burns covering 25 percent of her body – including her face, torso and legs. As part of her treatment, Frantzcia was placed in a medically- induced coma and hooked up to a respirator. At the time, it is alleged, Frantzcia's mother Marie Lauradin, told police that, in the early afternoon of February 4, 2009, she was in the kitchen preparing rice on the stove and that as she was transferring the pot from a front burner to a back one Frantzcia approached her from behind and hit her hand, causing her to spill the pot of boiling water on the child. Frantzcia's grandmother, Sylvénie Thessier, who is alleged to have been in the bathroom at the time of the incident, bathed the child and – although she was aware of the nature and extent of the child's injuries – assisted in placing Frantzcia in bed at approximately 4:00 p.m. where she remained until

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Frantzcia's aunt arrived the following evening and insisted that the child be taken to the hospital. Lauradin allegedly told police that she did not see any burns on her daughter until she was at the hospital.

It is further alleged that following her release from the hospital last month, Frantzcia was placed in foster care, where she eventually told her foster family a different account of what had occurred in February. According to the charges, Frantzcia was home on February 4th with Lauradin, Thessier and a family friend known as "Sketch," and that pursuant to her mother's belief in a voodoo practice called "Loa," her mother poured an accelerant on her head and in a circle on the floor. Lauradin then allegedly set the circle on fire and placed Frantzcia, who was naked, inside the ring of fire, at which point the accelerant on her body ignited and flames engulfed her. Although Thessier and "Sketch" were allegedly present in the room during this ritual, neither intervened – even after Frantzcia cried out for help.

The investigation was conducted by Detective Michael McNelis, of the New York City Police Department's Queens Child Abuse Squad, under the supervision of Sergeant Robert Garrity.

The case is being prosecuted by Leigh Bishop of the District Attorney's Special Victims Bureau, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Marjory D. Fisher, Bureau Chief, and Kenneth M. Appelbaum and Lucinda C. Suarez, Deputy Bureau Chiefs, 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 a criminal complaint is merely an accusation and that the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted at www.queensda.org.