



**RICHARD A. BROWN**  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
QUEENS COUNTY  
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD  
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568  
718-286-6000**

Release # 167-2009  
[www.queensda.org](http://www.queensda.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2009

**CONTACT: KEVIN RYAN  
HELEN PETERSON  
MERIS CAMPBELL  
(718) 286-6315**

**QUEENS “PASTOR” PLEADS GUILTY TO SCAMMING IMMIGRANTS  
BY CLAIMING TO BE ABLE TO GET THEM U.S. VISAS AND LEGAL STATUS**

*Faces Up To Six Years In Prison*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that a Westchester man who was one of the purported pastors of a storefront church in Corona has pleaded guilty to defrauding Queens immigrants – primarily from the Ecuadorian community – of more than \$50,000 by promising to help them expedite various immigration-related matters – including getting them U.S. Visas and permanent immigration status. A second defendant pleaded guilty last week to participating in the scheme.

District Attorney Brown said, “The defendant is admittedly a con man who preyed upon the faithful of his church to unscrupulously exploit individuals new to this country – and who were in need of assistance – to steal their money and their hopes for a better life. Ironically, in the end, it was prosecutors who did God’s work and brought the scheme to a halt.”

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Gerardo Bello, 21, of 119 New Street in Mamaroneck, New York. Bello appeared today before Acting Supreme Court Justice Pauline Mullings and pleaded guilty to second-degree grand larceny. Sentencing was set for September 24, 2009, at which time Justice Mullings indicated that she would likely sentence Bello to two to six years in state prison.

On September 1, 2009, a second defendant in the case – Maria Gonzalez, 52, of 55-08 97<sup>th</sup> Place in Corona – pleaded guilty to fourth-degree grand larceny before Justice Mullings, who indicated that she would sentence Gonzalez – who will forfeit \$75,000 in cash found at her residence and make restitution of an additional \$20,500 – to forty days of community service and five years’ probation. Gonzalez is the sister of a third defendant, Gregorio Gonzalez, 56, also of 119 New Street in Mamaroneck. His case is pending.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the charges, the defendants met with the victims at various Queens locations – including their church, Iglesia Pentecostal Roca de Salvacion Eterna, located at 98-14 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue in Corona and Maria Gonzalez’s apartment – between April 1, 2008, and October 31, 2008. The defendants promised to get their victims U.S. Visas and permanent immigration status for various fees – usually ranging from \$6,000 to \$10,000, in the form of cash or personal checks.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Jerome D. Pugh and Richard A. Lewis, of the District Attorney’s Detective Bureau, under the supervision of Lieutenant Robert Burke and Sergeant John Kenna, and under the overall supervision of Lawrence J. Festa, Chief Investigator, and Albert D. Velardi, Deputy Chief Investigator, along with Paralegal Ericka Loperena and Consumer Fraud Representative Michael Albanesi, of the District Attorney’s Economic and Environmental Crimes Bureau.

Assistant District Attorney Nathalie Bell, of the District Attorney’s Economic and Environmental Crimes Bureau, prosecuted the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Gregory C. Pavlides, Bureau Chief, and Christina Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

#

Note to Editor: An e-version of this press release is posted on QDA website at [www.queensda.org](http://www.queensda.org).