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**LONG-TERM INVESTIGATION LEADS TO ARREST OF 11 DRUG TRAFFICKERS;
LARGEST SEIZURE IN COUNTRY OF SUBSTANCE DEADLIER THAN FENTANYL**

*Eleven Pounds of Carfentanil Allegedly Recovered During Raids
Along with Cocaine, Fentanyl, Heroin, Ketamine and Other Illegal Narcotics;
Six Firearms - Including an AK47 - Taken Off Streets;
Ten Charged in Queens and a Single Defendant is Being Prosecuted in Rockland County*

Queens Acting District Attorney John M. Ryan, joined by New York City Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill, today announced that the leader of a complex drug-dealing operation that allegedly transported truck-loads of illicit narcotics across the country - including carfentanil, a substance 100 times more deadly than fentanyl - has been apprehended and charged in a 23-count indictment with being a major drug trafficker. This defendant and numerous co-defendants are variously charged with drug trafficking, conspiracy, criminal possession of a controlled substance and other crimes. A single male, who was apprehended in Clarkstown, New York, is facing charges in Rockland County.

Over the course of a long-term investigation - that began more than 2 years ago - law enforcement allegedly recovered 6 firearms, 68 pounds of cocaine, 50 pounds of fentanyl, 11 pounds of carfentanil, 8 pounds of heroin, in addition to various quantities of Ketamine and Tramadol. Using court-authorized wiretaps, surveillance and other investigative tools, police gained valuable insight into the organization, how drugs were being transported by long-haul truckers locally and across the country along with the various designated drop locations.

Acting District Attorney Ryan said, "The main defendant in this case operated a complicated illegal network of dealers and traffickers, who pumped deadly drugs which continue to contribute to the opioid epidemic in our communities. Although it is commonly known that this epidemic is fueled by the rise in fentanyl trafficking, the main defendant and his associates are also charged with trafficking carfentanil, another synthetic opioid - 100 times more potent than fentanyl. The seizure of 11 pounds of carfentanil from these defendants represents the largest seizure of its kind and has certainly resulted in saving lives. This long-term investigation has dismantled this drug peddling crew and also resulted in taking deadly drugs and firearms off our streets. I want to commend the members of the NYPD Major Case Squad for their hard work on this investigation. This office will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to stop criminals in their tracks and to keep our communities safe."

(MORE)

Commissioner O'Neill said, "These arrests and the significant seizure of narcotics exemplify the NYPD's commitment, with its law enforcement partners, to stopping drug traffickers from disrupting our communities. I want to commend the NYPD investigators and the Queens and Rockland county district attorney's offices for their work in this important case. Together, we continue to work relentlessly to rid our city of illegal drugs and to bring those who would seek to profit from their proliferation to justice."

The District Attorney's Office identified the main defendant as Giovanni Arias, 49, of White Plains, New York, who was arraigned on October 21, 2019, before Queens Supreme Court Justice Peter Vallone Jr., on a 23-count indictment charging him with operating as a major trafficker, first-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, second-degree criminally using drug paraphernalia and numerous other crimes. Justice Vallone remanded Arias without bail. The defendant's next court date is November 21, 2019. If convicted Arias faces up to 25 years to life in prison. **(See Addendum for details on all defendants).**

Law enforcement began this investigation looking into the activities of defendant Julian Tovar, who is alleged to be both a drug dealer and gun trafficker. On May 3, 2018, police executed a court-authorized search warrant for Tovar's apartment in Woodside, Queens, and allegedly recovered 5 handguns, large capacity ammunition-feeding magazines, more than 2 pounds of cocaine and over \$11,000 in cash. Acting on a second court-authorized search warrant for defendant Tovar's Jeep, law enforcement is alleged to have recovered an AK-47 assault weapon hidden in a secret compartment within the vehicle. Defendants Tovar and Arias allegedly worked together trafficking drugs.

According to the charges, between July 2018 and September 2019, defendant Arias with his co-defendants operated a nationwide drug enterprise utilizing long-haul truck drivers - defendants Mauricio Arevalo and Alexis Victorero - who allegedly transported drugs from the southern border of California to New York City, including Queens County. The tractor trailers allegedly hauled heroin, cocaine, fentanyl and carfentanil, a drug known to be 100 times deadlier than fentanyl.

Continuing, according to the indictment, said Acting DA Ryan, on July 21, 2018, Arias allegedly directed defendant John Pareja to make a pick up on the 22nd from a truck stop in New Jersey. Pareja was followed from that truck depot and stopped on the Van Wyck Expressway service road at Jewel Avenue later that day. Law enforcement executed a court-authorized search warrant for the vehicle Pareja was driving and police allegedly recovered 37 pounds of fentanyl, along with just over 2 pounds of Ketamine that was concealed in a hidden compartment in the floor under the front passenger seat. On October 29, 2018, defendant Arias is alleged to have directed co-defendant Victor Salazar to pick up 35 pounds of cocaine and more than 4 pounds of heroin from another rest stop in New Jersey. Salazar was stopped by police afterwards in Astoria, Queens, and allegedly recovered the drugs hidden in a mini-bar refrigerator box in the back seat of the car.

Acting DA Ryan added that, according to the indictment, on April 17, 2019, in a movie theater parking lot in Linden, New Jersey, defendant Arevalo delivered a black duffle bag from the cab of his truck to co-defendant Esther Riano-Lopez, who took the bag to a stash-house in Springfield Gardens, Queens, where Arias's associates - defendants Carlos Hidalgo and Armando de Jesus Moreno-Perez - were allegedly waiting to receive the drugs. At that time, Arias allegedly directed another co-defendant Hector Maren to come to the Queens stash-house to cut and repackage the narcotics.

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According to the charges, on April 18, 2019, members of the NYPD's Major Case Squad executed a court-authorized search warrant for the stash-house and allegedly recovered the black duffle bag along with 10 cylindrically-shaped packages containing a total of 11 pounds of a combination of carfentanil and fentanyl. Law enforcement also allegedly recovered 1 kilogram brick (about 2 pounds) of fentanyl, which was stamped with the logo of the UAE, Abu Dhabi Police Department and the words "good quality" in Arabic. A digital scale, plastic heat sealer and over a pound of a cutting agent were also found.

On September 25, 2019, according to the charges said Acting DA Ryan, Arias is alleged to have directed another long-haul truck driver, Alexis Victorero, to deliver a drug shipment from California to the New York area. Working in cooperation with the Clarkstown Police Department, defendant Victorero's truck was stopped by police just before hitting the Tappan Zee/Mario Cuomo Bridge, in Nyack, New York. A police K-9 searched the truck's cab and allegedly recovered over 28 pounds of cocaine, more than 2 pounds of a mixture of fentanyl and tramadol, over 2 pounds of heroin and over 1,500 counterfeit oxycodon pills containing fentanyl. Defendant Victorero is being prosecuting by the Rockland County District Attorney's Office.

Assistant District Attorney Philip D. Anderson, Section Chief of the District Attorney's Narcotics Investigations Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Wilbert J. LeMelle, Bureau Chief, Mark L. Katz and Julie S. Trivedi, Deputy Bureau Chiefs, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco.

It should be noted that a criminal complaint and an indictment are merely accusations and that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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ADDENDUM

GIOVANNY ARIAS, 49, of White Plains, NY, was arraigned on October 21, 2019, before Queens Supreme Court Justice Peter Vallone Jr., on a 23-count indictment charging him with operating as a major trafficker, first-, third- and fifth-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, a controlled substance, second-degree criminally using drug paraphernalia and second-degree conspiracy. Justice Vallone remanded the defendant. Arias' next court date is November 21, 2019. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 25 years to life in prison.

JOHN PAREJA, 38, of Stamford, Conn., will be arraigned on November 13, 2019, before Queens Supreme Court Justice Peter Vallone Jr., on a 23-count indictment charging him with operating as a major trafficker, first- and fifth-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, second-degree criminally using drug paraphernalia and second-degree conspiracy. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 25 years to life in prison.

FAINA FRANCO-POSADA, 43, of Elmhurst, Queens, will be arraigned on November 13, 2019, before Queens Supreme Court Justice Peter Vallone Jr., on an indictment charging her with first-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance and second-degree conspiracy. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 20 years in prison.

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ARMANDO DE JESUS MORENO-PEREZ, 55, of East Elmhurst, Queens, was arraigned yesterday before Queens Supreme Court Justice Stephanie Zaro on a 23-count indictment charging him with operating as a major trafficker, first- and fifth-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, second-degree criminally using drug paraphernalia and second-degree conspiracy. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 25 years to life in prison.

ESTHER RIANO-LOPEZ, 47, of Jamaica, Queens, was deported by the United States Department of Homeland Security on July 1, 2019. The defendant is charged with operating as a major drug trafficker, first- and fifth-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance and second-degree conspiracy. If the defendant returns to the United States, she faces up to 25 years to life in prison.

CARLOS HIDALGO, 38, of Jamaica, Queens, was arraigned yesterday before Acting Queens Supreme Court Justice Stephanie Zaro on a 23-count indictment charging him with operating as a major trafficker, first- and fifth-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, second-degree criminally using drug paraphernalia and second-degree conspiracy. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 25 years to life in prison.

HECTOR MAREN, 46, of White Plains, NY, was arraigned yesterday before Acting Queens Supreme Court Justice Stephanie Zaro on a 23-count indictment charging him with operating as a major trafficker, first- and fifth-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, second-degree criminally using drug paraphernalia and second-degree conspiracy. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 25 years to life in prison.

VICTOR SALAZAR, 59, of White Plains, NY, was arraigned yesterday before Queens Supreme Court Justice Stephanie Zaro on a 23-count indictment charging him with operating as a major trafficker, first- and fifth-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, second-degree criminally using drug paraphernalia and second-degree conspiracy. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 25 years to life in prison.

JULIAN TOVAR, 31, of Woodside, Queens, was arraigned on a criminal complaint before Queens Criminal Court Judge Carolyn Wade on May 5, 2019, charging him with first- and third-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, second-degree criminal possession of a weapon and criminal possession of a firearm. The defendant was released after posting \$5,000 bail, but failed to return to court, at which time a bench warrant was issued. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 20 years in prison.

ALEXIS VICTORERO, of Milford, Mass., is being prosecuted in Rockland County. In a 3-count indictment, the defendant is charged with first-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance. The defendant's next court date is December 10, 2019. If convicted, Victorero faces up to 20 years in prison.

MAURICIO AREVALO, 50, of Naples, Florida, was expected to be extradited from Florida and will be arraigned tomorrow, November 8, 2019, before Acting Queens Supreme Court Justice Stephanie Zaro on a 23-count indictment charging him with operating as a major trafficker, first- and fifth-degree criminal possession of a controlled substance, second-degree criminally using drug paraphernalia and second-degree conspiracy. If convicted, the defendant faces up to 25 years to life in prison.

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