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Leader of International Firearm Trafficking Conspiracy Sentenced to Federal Prison

PORTLAND, Ore.—A Mexican national residing in Portland was sentenced to federal prison today for his leadership role in a conspiracy to illegally obtain hundreds of high-powered, semi-automatic rifles and high-grade firearms in and around Portland and smuggle them into Mexico for use by the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG).

David Acosta-Rosales, 51, was sentenced to 75 months in federal prison and three years' supervised release.

"This case represents two important public safety issues. First, no state, regardless of its location and proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border, is beyond the reach of violent drug cartels. International drug trafficking may feel to most Americans like a distant, geopolitical issue with little connection to our own communities, but this could not be further from the truth. Second, every day across the U.S., drug traffickers and other criminals manipulate the legal process for obtaining firearms from licensed dealers in the U.S., of which there are hundreds of thousands. Our office will continue working closely with our law enforcement partners to prosecute anyone who attempts to illegally purchase or traffic firearms," said Scott Erik Asphaug, Acting U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon.

"ATF will tirelessly investigate anyone who traffics in firearms," said ATF Seattle Special Agent in Charge Jonathan T. McPherson. "Whether they are organizing an international trafficking cell, as Acosta-Rosales was doing, or they are straw purchasing firearms for trafficking purposes, we will work to ensure that they are caught and, through the U.S. Attorney's Office, prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

According to court documents, since at least September 2019, Acosta-Rosales served as the leader of a hierarchical gun trafficking cell operating in the Portland area. In this role, Acosta-Rosales managed several co-conspirators who served as high-volume straw purchasers and recruiters of new straw purchasers. These associates would also oversee and liaise with lower-volume straw purchasers, who would, in turn, pass the guns they acquired back up to Acosta-Rosales' direct reports.

Acosta-Rosales received orders and requests for semi-automatic rifles, high-grade firearms, and explosive devices from his "boss" in Mexico and other co-conspirators affiliated with CJNG. These co-conspirators were particularly interested and focused on obtaining high-powered,

especially deadly firearms such as AR-15 and AK-47 platform rifles, semi-automatic .50 caliber rifles, and premium, military-style combat assault rifles.

Acosta-Rosales received hundreds of thousands of dollars to operate his scheme and recruited numerous straw purchasers to make the illegal gun purchases. One of Acosta-Rosales' first recruits was his own young son who later withdrew himself from his father's criminal enterprise. Before the illegally obtained firearms were transferred out of Oregon via courier, Acosta-Rosales himself participated in obliterating serial numbers on the guns and also recruited a co-conspirator to help obliterate serial numbers. Acosta-Rosales continued operating the conspiracy even after ATF agents arrested one of his co-conspirators and seized many of the group's guns. In total, Acosta-Rosales facilitated the illegal purchase and transfer of approximately 150 guns to Mexico. He also acquired a grenade launcher and a .50 caliber tripod-mounted semi-automatic firearm that he intended to transfer to Mexico, but was arrested by federal agents before he could do so.

On October 6, 2020, a federal grand jury in Portland returned a 52-count indictment charging Acosta-Rosales and 10 associates with conspiracy, making false statements in connection with the acquisition of firearms, possessing and receiving firearms with obliterated serial numbers, and smuggling goods from the U.S.

Seven of Acosta-Rosales' co-conspirators have pleaded guilty. Five have been sentenced and two are pending sentencing. The remaining three co-conspirators are pending trial.

Acting U.S. Attorney Scott Erik Asphaug of the District of Oregon made the announcement.

This case was investigated by ATF and is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon.

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