

May 15, 2012
McAllen, TX

2 Mexican nationals indicted for alien harboring

Edinburg stash house case dubbed "Welcome to Hell"

MCALLEN, Texas — A Mexican couple was indicted Tuesday for conspiring to harbor aliens and alien harboring, announced U.S. Attorney Kenneth Magidson, Southern District of Texas. The investigation is being led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) with the assistance of U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Border Patrol.

Vicente Ortiz-Soto and Marcial Salas-Gardunio, both 23 and Mexican nationals, were indicted on charges of conspiracy to harbor aliens and alien harboring. The indictment returned May 15 alleges local law enforcement officers, working alongside federal authorities, were sent to a residence in Edinburg, Texas, May 2, after a 911 caller indicated he was being held against his will in an alien stash house.

According to court documents, upon arrival at the scene, authorities discovered more than 100 undocumented aliens of various countries of origin located in three separate buildings on the property. One building was chain-locked and several undocumented aliens who were locked inside the building were treated for injuries.

Statements taken from the undocumented aliens indicated they were allegedly threatened by Salas-Gardunio that they would be beaten or killed if they did not remain quiet. Additionally, witnesses indicated Salas-Gardunio stated "Welcome to Hell" when undocumented aliens arrived at the residence.

HSI arrested the couple May 2 without incident. Both will remain in federal custody without bond pending trial. A date for their arraignment on the formal charges alleged in the indictment will be set by the court in the near future.

If convicted, Ortiz-Soto and Salas-Gardunio could face a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000 on each count.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Cory J. H. Crenshaw, Southern District of Texas, is prosecuting the case.

The public is reminded that an indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. The defendants are presumed innocent unless convicted through due process of law.

<http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/1205/120515mcallen.htm>