

## **SECRETARY JOHNSON ANNOUNCES 192 CRIMINAL ARRESTS IN ONGOING ICE OPERATION TO CRACK DOWN ON HUMAN SMUGGLING TO THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY**

WASHINGTON — As part of the U.S. Government’s aggressive campaign to respond to the recent rise in illegal migration into South Texas, Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson, joined by U.S. Deputy Attorney General James Cole, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Thomas Winkowski, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Acting Operations Division Deputy Chief Jaime Salazar, today announced the progress of ongoing enforcement efforts by ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and the United States Department of Justice to target human smuggling networks in the Rio Grande Valley.

On June 23, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) surged personnel to the RGV as part of HSI’s efforts to target and dismantle human smuggling operations across the southwest border. Less than a month into this operation, 192 smugglers and their associates have already been arrested on criminal charges, more than 501 undocumented immigrants have been taken into custody and more than \$625,000 in illicit profits have been seized from 288 bank accounts held by human smuggling and drug trafficking organizations.

“We have continued to stress that our borders are not open to illegal migration and that if you enter the United States illegally, we will send you back,” said Secretary Johnson. “Equally important, those who prey upon migrants for financial gain will be targeted, arrested, and prosecuted. We are focusing on the pocketbooks of these human smugglers, including their money laundering activities in the United States – working with our Mexican and Central American partners to track, interdict, and seize the money flowing through Mexico and Central America.”

“The Department of Justice will continue to prioritize cases involving smuggling or transporting of undocumented individuals, including minors, into the United States,” said Deputy Attorney General James Cole. “We appreciate our longstanding partnership with ICE and DHS and look forward to continuing our work together on this important law enforcement initiative.”

Examples of enforcement actions taken in this ongoing operation include:

- On July 8, HSI special agents in McAllen, Texas, assisted by U.S. Border Patrol agents, encountered three suspected smugglers and 91 undocumented immigrants, including 12 unaccompanied children. The individuals were from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, China, Nicaragua and Mexico.
- On July 9, HSI special agents in McAllen, assisted by U.S. Border Patrol, rescued a Honduran woman who was being threatened and held against her will by her smugglers. Her family member in Alexandria, Va., was being extorted for \$2,000 in exchange for her release. Two Mexican nationals were arrested in McAllen on illegal immigrant smuggling charges.
- On July 17, HSI special agents in McAllen, assisted by U.S. Border Patrol and the Palmview, Texas Police Department identified an immigrant stash house in Palmview with 46 undocumented immigrants of various Central American

nationalities and two suspected illegal immigrant smugglers. The agents discovered the smugglers were part of an alien and drug smuggling operation connected to the smuggling of over 460 undocumented immigrants, more than 3,500 pounds of marijuana and 50 pounds of cocaine.

- On July 17, HSI Del Rio special agents arrested a Honduran national in San Antonio for illegal immigrant smuggling. The individual is a previously convicted cocaine smuggler and the leader of an illegal immigrant smuggling organization known for smuggling more than 400 undocumented immigrants into the United States since January 2013. A firearm in his possession was also seized.

HSI is also pursuing money laundering activity associated with the transnational criminal activities of transnational human and drug smuggling operations, particularly focused on the exploitation of sophisticated ways smugglers and traffickers are using the financial system to further their activities. HSI is focused on identifying, targeting and dismantling criminal organizations using these accounts in order to disrupt the larger networks involved in human smuggling.

In May, HSI conducted Operation Southern Crossing, a month-long initiative along the U.S. southwest border in which 163 alien smugglers and other violators were arrested. HSI special agents also obtained 60 indictments and 45 convictions, seized 29 vehicles, nine firearms and more than \$35,000 in illicit proceeds.

These efforts are part of the continuing U.S. government-wide response to address the recent influx of illegal migration coming across the southwest border. DHS will continue to vigorously pursue and dismantle these human smuggling organizations by all investigative means to include the financial structure of these criminal organizations. ICE HSI has deployed 60 additional criminal investigators and support personnel to their San Antonio and Houston offices for this purpose, as well as supplementing this with additional intelligence and programmatic support from ICE headquarters. Additionally, on June 30, Secretary Johnson announced the deployment of approximately 150 U.S. Border Patrol agents to the Rio Grande Valley Sector to augment illegal entry detection efforts to execute joint, targeted enforcement operations in order to disrupt and degrade criminal organizations that are responsible for smuggling illegal immigrants and drugs throughout the South Texas Corridor.

The public is encouraged to report suspected human smuggling by calling the ICE tip line toll-free at 1-866-DHS-2ICE.

For more information, visit [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov).