



News Releases

APRIL 21, 2011
FRESNO, CA

3 men charged in ICE probe targeting central California phony document ring

FRESNO, Calif. - Two Mexican nationals and a Honduran native were indicted Thursday by a federal grand jury here following a joint probe by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and the California Department of Motor Vehicles into a Tulare County-based document counterfeiting scheme.

Ruben Gonzalez-Gonzalez, 44, of Mexico, Margarito Zavala-Barrera, 32, of Mexico, and Noel Fernando Canales-Amador, 28, of Honduras, are charged with conspiracy, possession, transfer, production, and sale of fraudulent immigration and identification documents.

According to court documents, between December 2010 and April 6, Gonzalez Gonzalez met customers in a public location in Tulare, took their pictures and collected biographical information. Then he would contact Zavala-Barrera or Canales Amador to produce the requested documents. Upon request, Zavala-Barrera and Canales-Amador would produce and provide the completed documents to Gonzalez-Gonzalez who would sell them to the customer. Zavala Barrera is also charged with being a previously deported alien found in the United States.

"Those who knowingly and indiscriminately sell phony identity documents are putting the security of our communities and even our country at risk," said Paul Leonardi, resident agent in charge of ICE HSI in Fresno. "Counterfeit documents can potentially be used by dangerous criminals and others who are attempting to obscure their identities and cover their tracks."

The defendants, who face a maximum sentence of up to 15 years in prison, will be arraigned April 22 by U.S. Magistrate Judge Sheila K. Oberto. The case is being prosecuted Assistant U.S. Attorney Ian Garriques from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of California.