



# News Release

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## **ATF ANNOUNCES 7 NEW GUNRUNNER GROUPS AND PHOENIX GUN RUNNER IMPACT TEAMS' SUCCESSES**

PHOENIX - Deputy Director Kenneth E. Melson of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) announced today the formation of seven new Project Gunrunner firearms trafficking groups during a news conference in which he and Dennis K. Burke, United States Attorney, District of Arizona announced the results of ATF's Gun Runner Impact Team (GRIT) initiative, a nearly 100-day deployment of ATF resources to the Phoenix Field Division to disrupt illegal firearms trafficking by Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

As a result of the 2010 emergency supplemental appropriation for border security, ATF received \$37.5 million for Project Gunrunner, ATF's comprehensive firearms trafficking strategy to disrupt the flow of illegal firearms into Mexico. With this funding, ATF will establish and place the trafficking groups along traditional and newly discovered firearms trafficking routes and hubs in Atlanta; Brownsville, Texas; Dallas; Las Vegas; Miami; Oklahoma City; and Sierra Vista, Ariz.

"Lives are being lost to violent crime every day on both sides of the U.S. and Mexico border," said Melson. "Through Project Gunrunner and its GRIT initiative, ATF is shutting down the supply routes of illegal firearms traffickers along the border and as they attempt to stretch further inland."

The GRIT initiative brought over 80 experienced ATF personnel from around the country to Arizona and New Mexico. GRIT special agents initiated 174 firearms trafficking-related criminal investigations and seized almost 1,300 illegal firearms, over 71,000 rounds of ammunition, drugs and currency. ATF's industry operations investigators conducted over 800 federal firearms licensee compliance inspections.

"We are fighting on a crucial front here today to reduce violence in our own communities, and to disrupt and dismantle the southbound supply of weapons to the cartels," said U.S. Attorney Dennis K. Burke. "We will not be a gun-locker for the cartels, who have made murder and mayhem their modus operandi, and we will not tolerate violent criminals and others who illegally possess, purchase, or sell firearms."

U.S. Attorney Burke announced that 96 defendants have been arrested, charged, convicted, or sentenced since June 2010 on gun-related charges. The majority of defendants include violent felons, drug traffickers who used weapons, and those trafficking firearms to Mexico. Cases involved over 370 guns – many of them AK-47

style rifles and other “weapons of choice” of drug cartels – and hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition smuggled into or destined for Mexico. Some of the guns seized in the investigation, including a .50 caliber weapon, were recovered at crime scenes in Mexico.

Recent examples of firearms prosecutions in the District of Arizona:

U.S. v. Arizmendiz et al.

In July and August, two leaders of a firearms trafficking conspiracy that supplied at least 112 firearms – mostly AK-47 style – to the Sinaloa cartel, were sentenced. Alejandro Medrano, 23, and Hernan Ramos, 22, both of Mesa, Ariz., were sentenced to 46 and 50 months in prison respectively for leading a conspiracy involving 10 defendants who straw purchased firearms from gun dealers in Phoenix and Tucson in order to supply them to a member of the Sinaloa cartel known as “Rambo.”

U.S. v. Gaeda et al

On June 3, following an ATF investigation involving over 250,000 rounds of ammunition, ATF agents arrested Emmanuel Casquez, Elias Vasquez, and Charice Gaeda for unlawfully exporting ammunition to Mexico. Agents had learned the three were purchasing vast quantities of ammunition and searched a vehicle headed for the border port at Nogales and recovered 9,500 rounds of ammunition; a search of a residence ensued and additional 27,000 rounds of ammunition were recovered.

U.S. v. Ibarra et al.

In July, a 20-count indictment was announced charging 10 straw purchasers, recruited by then 17-year old named Francisco Ibarra, to buy at least 25 firearms. ATF believes the firearms were trafficked into Mexico.

For more information on ATF and Project Gunrunner, please go to the ATF website, [www.atf.gov](http://www.atf.gov).

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