

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

---

---



***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA  
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney  
Karen P. Hewitt***

***For Further Information, Contact:***

---

---

***Assistant U.S. Attorney Sherri Walker Hobson at (619) 557-5027***

---

---

***For Immediate Release***

## **CALEXICO NARCOTICS TUNNEL OPERATORS PLEAD GUILTY IN FEDERAL COURT**

**NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY** - February 23, 2010

United States Attorney Karen P. Hewitt announced today that defendant Saul Ontiveros-Zamora, of Mexico, and defendant Eduardo Araza-Leon, of Calexico, California, pled guilty to federal charges related to a narcotics tunnel that was discovered on September 15, 2006, by federal agents during a multi-agency investigation. Yesterday in federal court, defendant Saul Ontiveros-Zamora, who has been in custody since September 19, 2008, pled guilty before the Honorable L. James Lorenz, United States District Court Judge for the Southern District of California, to conspiracy to import approximately 2,000 pounds of marijuana, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Sections 952, 960, and 963, and conspiracy to launder drug proceeds, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1956(a)(1)(A)(I) and 1956(h). Today, defendant Eduardo Araza-Leon, who has been in continuous custody, since June 8, 2006, pled guilty before United States Magistrate Judge Cathy Ann Bencivengo for the Southern District of California, to renting a

drug-related premises, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 856(a)(1), and conspiracy to launder drug proceeds, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 1956(a)(1)(A)(I) and 1956(h).

As part of his guilty plea, defendant Ontiveros-Zamora admitted to Judge Lorenz that in April 2006, he directed Eduardo Araza-Leon to rent a residence located in Calexico, California, for the purpose of constructing a narcotics tunnel from Mexico into the United States. Defendant Ontiveros-Zamora also admitted that he directed Eduardo Araza-Leon to rent the Mexicali, Mexico, residence, the location of the tunnel's entrance, several months prior to April 2006. Defendant Ontiveros-Zamora admitted that the construction of the tunnel took approximately nine months. Defendant Ontiveros-Zamora also agreed that he played a managerial role in the offense. In connection with the money-laundering count, defendant Ontiveros-Zamora admitted that he directed Eduardo Araza-Leon to rent the Calexico premises and used drug proceeds to pay rent to maintain that residence, the location of the tunnel's exit point. Defendant Ontiveros-Zamora also admitted that he intended to purchase the Calexico residence for \$350,000 and paid \$10,000 cash to the owners as a down payment for the purchase of this residence. During his guilty plea today, defendant Araza-Leon admitted to Magistrate Judge Bencivengo that he rented the Mexican and United States residences at the direction of defendant Ontiveros-Zamora for the purpose of constructing a narcotics tunnel. In addition, defendant Araza-Leon admitted that he paid the rent for the Calexico residence with drug proceeds, at the direction of defendant Ontiveros-Zamora.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Sherri Walker Hobson, who is prosecuting the case, defendants Ontiveros-Zamora and Araza-Leon agreed to rent both locations and construct the narcotics tunnel. While in federal custody on an unrelated matter, defendant Araza-Leon discussed the final construction stages of the narcotics tunnel with Ontiveros-Zamora. Subsequently, several federal agencies, including Special Agents with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigations (IRS), and DHS-Office of the Inspector General, assisted in this proactive investigation that led to the discovery of the narcotics tunnel on September 15, 2006 at the Calexico residence.

Defendant Saul Ontiveros-Zamora's sentencing date is scheduled for May 24, 2010, at 10:30 a.m.

before Judge Lorenz. Defendant Araza-Leon is scheduled for sentencing before Judge Lorenz on May 10, 2010, at 10:30 a.m. Two other defendants have been convicted in connection with this narcotics tunnel investigation, including courier Jesus Bernardo Aguila-Agundez, who was arrested while transporting approximately 1,143 pounds of marijuana, from the same Calexico residence, and Antonio Morales-Barrios, who was the short-term caretaker of the residence. Jesus Bernardo Aguila-Agundez was sentenced on August 8, 2007, before the Honorable Marilyn L. Huff, United States District Court Judge, Southern District of California, to 60 months in custody. Antonio Morales-Barrios was sentenced on October 6, 2008, to 30 months in custody by Judge Huff.

United States Attorney Hewitt praised the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) for the coordinated team effort in the culmination of this investigation. Several local, state and federal law enforcement agencies assisted in this OCDETF investigation, including the Drug Enforcement Administration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Internal Revenue Service, and Office of Inspector General. The OCDETF program was created to consolidate and utilize all law enforcement resources in this country's battle against major drug trafficking.

### **DEFENDANTS**

Saul Ontiveros-Zamora Mexico	Case Number: 08cr3546L	In Custody
Eduardo Araza-Leon Calexico, California	Case Number: 09cr1527L	In Custody

### **SUMMARY OF CHARGES AS TO SAUL ONTIVEROS-ZAMORA**

Conspiracy to Import 2,000 Pounds of Marijuana  
Title 21, United States Code, Sections 952, 960, and 963  
Penalties: 5 year minimum mandatory to 40 years in custody; 5 years of supervised release, \$1,000,000 fine

Conspiracy To Launder Drug Proceeds  
Title 18, United States Code, Section 1956(h) and Sections 1956(a)(1)(A)(I)  
Penalties: 20 years maximum, 3 years of supervised release, and \$500,000 fine

### **SUMMARY OF CHARGES AS TO EDUARDO ARAZA-LEON**

Maintaining & Renting Drug-Involved Premise

Title 21, United States Code, Section 856(a)(1)

Penalties: 20 years maximum, 3 years of supervised release, \$500,000 fine

Conspiracy To Launder Drug Proceeds

Title 18, United States Code, Sections 1956(h) and 1956(a)(1)(A)(I)

Penalties: 20 years maximum, 3 years of supervised release, and \$500,000 fine

**PARTICIPATING AGENCIES**

Drug Enforcement Administration

Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigations

Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General