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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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# **Nineteen People Arrested In Automobile Export Bribery Scheme**

**TUCSON, ARIZONA** -- The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced today that nineteen people were arrested in connection with an Automobile Export Bribery Scheme. A federal grand jury at Tucson, Arizona, returned a 54-count indictment on February 25, 2004, against the following defendants: Jose Ramon Duran Escoboza (D.O.B. 9/20/78), Jesus Alonso Covarrubias Mendivil (D.O.B. 1/2/77), Zeus Castaneda-Castaneda (D.O.B. 9/6/77), Ruben Martinez Merino (D.O.B. 4/29/66), Jose Padilla Lopez (D.O.B. 9/30/79), Jesus Miguel Fierro Caravantes (D.O.B. 1/9/83), Rafael Valenzuela-Clark (D.O.B. 9/29/75), Ruben Mejia Ochoa 4/11/75), Romulo Izquierdo Lizardo 3/27/68), Jesus Alvarez 9/24/60), Tomas Caballero Rodriguez 10/18/74), Fernando Aburto (D.O.B. unknown), Luis Fernando Sanchez Saucedo (D.O.B. 5/11/58), Javier Robles Rodriguez (D.O.B. 10/31/83), Pedro Gaxiolla-Ayala (D.O.B. 9/13/79), Monica Mojarro Neri 10/16/69), Jose De Jesus Heredia Sanchez 3/9/45), Sergio Manuel Andrade Encinas (D.O.B. 5/13/73), and Ernesto Navarro Torres (D.O.B. 2/19/79). The charges include violations of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 201(b)(1)(A), 201(b)(1)(C), 201(b)(2)(C), Bribery of a Public Official; Title 18, United States Code, Section 201(c)(1)(A), Illegal Gratuity; and Title 18, United States Code, Section 2, Aiding and Abetting. A conviction for Bribery of a Public Official

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carries a maximum penalty of not more than fifteen years, a \$250,000 fine, or both. A conviction for Illegal Gratuity carries maximum penalty of not more than two years, a \$250,000 fine, or both.

The indictment alleges that between September, 2003 and February, 2004, all persons or entities exporting used automobiles were required to provide the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) export office, at least 72 hours prior to the exportation of the automobile, vehicle ownership documentation. During a mandatory 72-hour waiting period, the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) was cross-referenced against numerous databases to confirm that the vehicle had not been reported stolen, there were no existing liens, and to create a record of the export. After the automobile had been cleared through the databases, a CBP employee affixed an official agency stamp to reflect the appropriate export date. CBP did not charge a fee for this service.

The indictment alleges that in three separate counts, Jesus Alvarez, an employee of the National Insurance Crime Bureau who worked in the CBP export office in Nogales, Arizona, accepted money in exchange for stamping the automobile ownership documents with the CBP export stamp, allowing those automobiles to circumvent the mandatory 72-hour waiting period.

The indictment further alleges that all of the remaining individuals either owned or were employed by companies that assisted people with exporting their used vehicles to the Republic of Mexico. These people made monetary payments to a CBP Inspector. In return for these payments, the Inspector would stamp vehicle titles or bills of sale, or issue official vehicle export letters, which would enable those individuals to circumvent the mandatory 72-hour waiting period.

An indictment is simply the method by which a person is charged with criminal activity and raises no inference of guilt. An individual is presumed innocent until competent evidence is presented to a jury that establishes guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

The investigation preceding the indictment was conducted by Special Agents of the United States Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General.

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The prosecution is being handled by Jeffrey H. Jacobson, Assistant United States Attorney,  
District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona.

CASE NUMBER: CR-04-0430-TUC  
RELEASE NUMBER: 2004-051

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