Beat: News

Jury Convicts Seven MS-13 Members and Associates of Sex Trafficking a Minor

Trafficked her in Virginia and Maryland

Alexandria, Virginia, 29.06.2022, 07:18 Time

USPA NEWS - A jury convicted seven MS-13 gang members and associates on charges of sex trafficking a minor under the age of 14 and other child sexual exploitation offenses.

According to court records and evidence presented at trial, in August 2018, the 13-year-old victim ran away from a youth home in northern Virginia. Shortly after running away, the victim was introduced to members of MS-13. Members of the gang told her they would be her family and protect her if she joined the gang. Gang members then beat the victim 26 times with a baseball bat as part of a gang initiation. Gang members then sex trafficked her in Virginia and Maryland using the currency of cash and drugs. In one instance while in Virginia, men lined up to have sex with the victim in a wooded area behind two of the defendants' apartment complex. She was also harbored in various apartments in Northern Virginia where men paid her and her handlers cash for sex.

The victim was later beaten again with a bat 26 times as a form of gang punishment. Shortly after the second bat beating, the victim was transported to Maryland, where she was sold to numerous gang members and other customers in exchange for cash and drugs, including cocaine. Law enforcement recovered photographs and videos of the victim being sexually exploited, along with numerous social media messages regarding the trafficking and sexual exploitation of her.

Below is a list of individuals convicted and their charges:

Moises Zeyala-Veliz, 26, Woodbridge, VA. Sex trafficking a minor under the age of 14; Conspiracy to sex traffic a minor under the age of 14; Conspiracy to transport a minor across state lines for purposes of illegal sexual activity

Jose Eliezar Molina-Veliz, 22, Woodbridge, VA. Sex trafficking a minor under the age of 14; Conspiracy to sex traffic a minor under the age of 14; Conspiracy to transport a minor across state lines for purposes of illegal sexual activity

Santos Ernesto Gutierrez Castro, 22, Woodbridge, VA. Sex trafficking a minor under the age of 14; Conspiracy to sex traffic a minor under the age of 14; Conspiracy to transport a minor across state lines for purposes of illegal sexual activity

Luis Alberto Gonzales, 33, Greenbelt, MD. Sex trafficking a minor under the age of 14 and via force, fraud, and coercion; Conspiracy to sex traffic a minor under the age of 14; Conspiracy to transport a minor across state lines for purposes of illegal sexual activity

Reina Elizabeth Hernandez, 50, Hyattsville, MD. Sex trafficking a minor under the age of 14.

Gilberto Morales, 34, Hyattsville, MD. Sex trafficking a minor under the age of 14; Conspiracy to sex traffic a minor under the age of 14

Jonathan Rafael Zeyala-Veliz, 26, Hyattsville, MD. Sex trafficking a minor under the age of 14; Conspiracy to sex traffic a minor under the age of 14; Conspiracy to transport a minor across state lines for purposes of illegal sexual activity

Each defendant faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 15 years' incarceration with a maximum penalty of life in prison. Their sentencing dates are currently set for November 10. Actual sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalties. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after taking into account the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Jessica D. Aber, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; Wayne A. Jacobs, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Washington Field Office Criminal Division; Kevin Davis, Fairfax County Chief of Police; and Peter Newsham, Chief of Prince William County Police, made the announcement after Senior U.S. District Judge Anthony J. Trenga accepted the verdict.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Maureen Cain, Seth Schlessinger, and Zoe Bedell are prosecuting the case.

This case was investigated by the FBI Washington Field Office's Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Force. The task force is composed of FBI agents, along with other federal agents and detectives from northern Virginia and the District of Columbia. The task force is charged with investigating and bringing federal charges against individuals engaged in the exploitation of children and those engaged in human trafficking. Significant assistance was provided by the FBI Baltimore Field Office.

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Source: Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Virginia press release June 24, 2022

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-21155/jury-convicts-seven-ms-13-members-and-associates-of-sex-trafficking-a-minor.html

Editorial office and responsibility:
V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Wendy Westhoven

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619