



July 24, 2003

Yuma Motel Owners Arrested and Indicted for Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal Aliens at Their Motel

YUMA, ARIZONA. The husband and wife owners of the RegaLodge Motel along with another family member were arrested today in connection with a joint migrant smuggling operation led by agents with the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (BICE) and Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (BCBP). The indictment unsealed today alleges that since 2002, the trio conspired with alien smuggling organizations to harbor illegal aliens at the motel. The three were taken into custody by ICE agents at the motel this morning along with eight illegal aliens who were locked inside one of the motel rooms.

The indictment alleges Bharatkuma Jivabhai Patel, his wife Vinaben M. Patel, and her father Mafatlal Patel Ujamdas. conspired to harbor illegal aliens, a charge that carries a maximum sentence of ten years in prison. The Patels, who are naturalized United States citizens, have run the 26-room motel in the 300 block of 4th Avenue for over two years.

During the investigation, it was determined that aliens were transported to the RegaLodge Motel where they were placed in motel rooms by the owners who then placed special locking devices on the inside doorknob of the hotel that prevented the aliens from leaving. The motel owners charged the smugglers a daily fee per alien to harbor and to feed the aliens.

According to Paul Charlton the United States Attorney for the District of Arizona, "This is the first time a motel operator in Yuma has been indicted on charges related to migrant smuggling, and this case should send a message to other proprietors about supporting those engaged in this type of criminal enterprise. We will vigorously prosecute those who smuggle illegal aliens into this country and those who harbor or transport them."

According to ICE Acting Assistant Secretary Michael J.Garcia, "Migrant smuggling puts human lives and our nation's security in jeopardy. ICE is aggressively pursuing not only migrant smugglers, but those who aid and abet them." Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Robert Bonner stated, "CBP is firmly committed to combating migrant smuggling and to working with other law enforcement agencies to bring down those who support this criminal enterprise. Cooperative law enforcement efforts on this front are saving lives and making our nation a safer place." The three defendants made their initial

appearance before a Federal magistrate in Yuma this afternoon. Authorities have also taken steps to prevent transfer of the motel's ownership during the course of the legal proceedings.

An indictment is the method by which a person is charged with criminal activity and does not infer guilt. An individual is presumed innocent until proven guilty and evidence is presented to a jury that establishes guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

The prosecution is being handled by Lisa Settel, Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona.