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PRESS RELEASE

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**THREE NEW MEXICANS CHARGED WITH FRAUDULENTLY SELLING
FILIPINO-MADE JEWELRY AS NATIVE AMERICAN-MADE**

***Sixteen Search Warrants Executed in New Mexico and California as Part of
Continuing Investigation into Alleged Violations of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act***

ALBUQUERQUE – Three New Mexicans have been charged with violating the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA) by conspiring to import and fraudulently sell Filipino-made jewelry as Native American-made. The indictment charging the three defendants is the result of an ongoing federal investigation led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service into an international scheme to violate the IACA that included a law enforcement operation yesterday during which 16 search warrants were executed in New Mexico and California and related investigative activity took place in the Philippines.

The IACA prohibits the offer or display for sale, or the sale of any good in a manner that falsely suggests that it is Indian produced, an Indian product, or the product of a particular Indian and Indian tribe. The law is designed to prevent products from being marketed as “Indian made,” when the products are not, in fact, made by Indians. It covers all Indian and Indian-style traditional and contemporary arts and crafts produced after 1935, and broadly applies to the marketing of arts and crafts by any person in the United States. IACA provides critical economic benefits for Native American cultural development by recognizing that forgery and fraudulent Indian arts and crafts diminish the livelihood of Native American artists and craftspeople by lowering both market prices and standards.

“American Indian and Alaska Native people have contributed tremendously to the cultural and artistic heritage of our nation and they have an important future that must be protected,” said Acting Associate Attorney General Stuart F. Delery. “This case demonstrates our willingness to prosecute those who falsely market products as ‘Indian Made’ and thus undermine the livelihoods of Native American artists and craftspeople, many of whom are responsible for carrying precious spiritual and artistic knowledge from one generation to another.”

“The indictment announced today and yesterday’s enforcement operation are not only about enforcing the law but also about protecting and preserving the cultural heritage of Native Americans,” said U.S. Attorney Damon P. Martinez. “The cultural heritage of American Indians is a precious national resource and it is critically important that we provide the proper respect to those whose creations are seen by some as simple retail commodities to be exploited for profit.”

“As Chairman of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, U.S. Department of the Interior, I want to convey the Board’s deep appreciation for the outstanding leadership and contributions provided by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of New Mexico and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, along with the other agency partners who participated in bringing this landmark enforcement action under the Indian Arts and Crafts Act,” said Chairman Harvey Pratt of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. “By requiring truth-in-marketing of Indian art and craftwork, the Act is intended to protect Native American artists and artisans who rely heavily on the production and sale of traditional and contemporary art and craftworks to provide their economic livelihood, preserve their rich heritage, and pass along their unique culture from generation to generation. Unfair competition from counterfeit Native American art and craftwork seriously erodes the sustainability, vitality, and economic well-being of Indian tribes and their members and businesses. The Act is also intended to protect the consumers who purchase Native American art, bringing much needed financial resources to Indian communities in the Southwest and across the country. Eliminating the flow of counterfeit Native American art and craftwork provides a level playing field for the highly talented, dedicated, and hard-working producers of genuine Native American art. We must protect these authentic American Treasures.”

“Under our 2012 cooperative agreement with the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has investigated numerous potential violations of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act,” said Nicholas E. Chavez, Special Agent in Charge for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement for the Southwest Region. “Our investigations primarily have focused on identifying fraudulent schemes where jewelry is marketed and sold as authentic Native American adornments to defraud tourists and other consumers. Through these investigations, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service endeavors to protect and preserve the authenticity of jewelry produced by our country’s Native American artisans.”

The four-count indictment that was unsealed earlier today charges Nael Ali, 51, and Mohammad Abed Manasra, 53, both of Albuquerque, N.M., and Christina Bowen,

41, of Los Lunas, N.M., with conspiracy to violate IACA and three substantive violations of the Act. Ali is the owner of two jewelry stores, Gallery 8 and Galleria Azul, in Albuquerque's Old Town that purport to specialize in the sale of Native American jewelry. Bowen was formerly employed as a store manager by Ali. Manasra holds himself out as a wholesaler of Native American jewelry.

Ali was arrested in Albuquerque yesterday and Bowen surrendered to the U.S. Marshals Service this morning. Both made their initial appearances in federal court in Albuquerque this morning and were released pending trial. Manasra was arrested yesterday in La Habra, Calif., and will be transferred to the District of New Mexico to face the charges against him. If convicted of the charges against them, the defendants each face a statutory maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000.00 fine. Charges in indictments are merely accusations and defendants are presumed innocent unless found guilty in a court of law.

During yesterday's law enforcement operation and as part of the continuing investigation, federal agents executed 15 search warrants in New Mexico and one in California. Eight of the search warrants were executed in Albuquerque including four at retail and wholesale jewelry businesses. In addition, search warrants were executed at three jewelry stores in Gallup, three jewelry stores in Santa Fe, and a jewelry production shop in Zuni. Federal agents also executed a search warrant at a jewelry store in Calistoga, Calif. Three federal seizure warrants also were executed on bank accounts in a Charlotte, N.C., bank and a San Francisco, Calif., bank. In addition, the Philippines National Bureau of Investigations conducted a series of investigative interviews at two factories in Cebu City, Philippines.

The case was investigated by the Office of Law Enforcement for the Southwest Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with assistance from the FBI, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), U.S. Marshals Service, DEA and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Law Enforcement for Region Eight and California Department of Fish and Wildlife provided support in Calistoga, Calif., and HSI provided support in La Habra, Calif. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Attaché for Southeast Asia and the Philippine National Bureau of Investigations provided support in Cebu City, Philippines. Assistant U.S. Attorney Kristopher N. Houghton is prosecuting the case.

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