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## Accused Colombian drug kingpin charged in New York



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By Agence France-Presse

A Colombian former right-wing paramilitary accused of heading one of the country’s largest drug cartels was formally charged Tuesday in New York after his extradition one day prior.

Daniel Rendon Herrera, known as “Don Mario,” appeared in federal court in Brooklyn where he was charged with leading a criminal enterprise — one of the most powerful and feared drugs cartels in the country, known as the Gulf Clan.

Donning sportswear and black-rimmed glasses, the 54-year-old — a former leader of Colombia’s “united self-defense forces,” the right-wing paramilitary groups that formed to fight Marxist rebels — pleaded not guilty during his appearance before Judge Viktor Pohorelsky.

According to prosecutors his organization “imported tons of cocaine into the United States and employed hit men who carried out acts of violence across North and South America.”

Between 2013 and 2014 the Gulf Clan was linked to multi-ton cocaine shipments and “coordinated the production, purchase and transfer of shipments of cocaine, as well as the receipt of shipments of cocaine in Mexico and Central America,” prosecutors said.

The organization also imposed a “tax” on other drug traffickers operating in territories it ruled over.

Rendon was captured in a jungle raid in 2009 but the Supreme Court initially ruled that he could not be extradited until he had taken part in the country’s reparations process, which provides a degree of amnesty for former fighters who testify about crimes committed during the country’s half-century of civil war.

The self-defense groups had been formed in the 1990s to fight the Marxist guerillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and were disbanded in 2006 during the presidency of Alvaro Uribe.

The FARC signed a final peace deal with the Colombian government in 2016, but the country remains the world’s leading supplier of cocaine, much of which is smuggled to the United States, the world’s leading consumer of the drug. (AFP)

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