

## **FEDS NAB ALLEGED ENFORCER IN MEX LABOR RING**

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### **Body**

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An illegal immigrant initially believed to be one of the victims of a Queens-based forced-**labor ring** that abused deaf Mexicans was charged yesterday with being an **enforcer** in the plot.

**Federal** agents arrested Ivan Gomez-Sanchez, 24, at the Westway Motor Inn near LaGuardia Airport, where 55 deaf Mexican immigrants have been housed since they were rescued from two Jackson Heights homes by authorities.

He was picked up after informants providing information about the New York operation and a related **ring** said he was an **enforcer** who monitored the immigrants allegedly forced to sell trinkets on the streets and subways.

Gomez-Sanchez collected the money raised by the deaf immigrants and used "threats of physical violence" to keep them in line, according to a complaint filed yesterday in Brooklyn **Federal** Court.

He was charged with conspiring to smuggle, transport and harbor illegal aliens. Defense lawyer David Gordon said Gomez-Sanchez, who was ordered held without bail yesterday, "denies being an **enforcer**" and instead was a victim.

The attorney said Gomez-Sanchez went to 115th Precinct police on his own last week and was sent to join the other deaf immigrants at the Queens hotel. "The question is, 'Would an **enforcer** go to the police?' I wouldn't think so," Gordon said.

Prosecutors declined to say when Gomez-Sanchez arrived at the motel or why. Gomez-Sanchez, who entered the U.S. illegally in 1995, is the latest suspect **nabbed** in a scam that allegedly victimized deaf Mexican immigrants in New York and Chicago. Authorities are also investigating possible links to other locations, including Sanford, N.C.

Cops said three people, including another **enforcer** and a deaf Mexican woman who allegedly masterminded the scam, were arrested in Chicago over the weekend. They are being brought to New York for prosecution with eight suspects held on **federal** or state charges in connection with the Queens operation.

Hours before yesterday's arraignment, Mexico City Mayor-elect Cuauhtemoc Cardenas visited the immigrants at the Queens motel. Afterward, Cardenas said he would focus on economic development in a bid to stop the flow of low-income Mexicans fleeing to the U.S. for bottom-**rung** jobs.

"We will try to improve the living standards in Mexico by creating more jobs so that something like this does not happen again," Cardenas said.

Queens District Attorney Richard Brown said the victimized Mexicans were stunned to see the popular politician who opposes Mexico's ruling party. "They were happy he had taken the time to visit," Brown said.

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