

# **IMMIGRATION OFFICERS ARREST 38 WANTED FOR SMUGGLING FOREIGNERS INTO THE U.S.; AUTHORITIES HAD HELP FROM SEVERAL COUNTRIES IN LATIN AMERICA**

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## **Body**

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**U.S. immigration officers** working with officials in Mexico and five Central American nations have **arrested 38** people **wanted** for **smuggling foreigners** into the United States. **Immigration officials** detained 3,500 people before they got to the United States.

**Immigration** Commissioner Doris Meissner announced the results of the operation at a news conference Tuesday. The three-week operation began Sept. 21.

She said the joint operation was an "extremely cost-effective" way to attack the growing, "nasty and vicious" billion-dollar alien **smuggling** business. Catching smugglers and their clients in **Latin America** saves the **U.S.** government the cost of finding and detaining illegal aliens and "is much less dangerous for the migrants," whose lives often are put at risk during their journey, she said.

The most significant **arrest** was made with **help** from the Guatemalan government. Two individuals working in Guatemala for the **U.S. Immigration** and Naturalization Service found Jose Leon Castillo, believed to be a leader in the **smuggling** trade. Guatemala expelled him to his native **country**, Honduras, by putting him on a plane that went first to the United States, said Richard Cravener, head of the **immigration** service's Houston office. Upon his arrival in Los Angeles on Oct. 5, Castillo was **arrested**. He will be transferred later this month to Houston, where he faces federal alien **smuggling** charges.

The **immigration** service considers Castillo one of the hemisphere's most notorious smugglers. Meissner said that Castillo has **smuggled** thousands of illegal aliens into the United States during his more than five years running a major operation.

The other Central American **countries** taking part in the operation were Belize, El Salvador, Honduras and Panama. Thirty-four of the **38** smugglers were **arrested** outside the United States and face charges where they were taken into custody.

The 3,500 migrants detained abroad were destined for this **country**, most had paid up to \$ 3,800 apiece to the smugglers, Meissner said. The migrants came from 25 different **countries**, but primarily from Guatemala, Honduras, Ecuador and El Salvador. They were detained for **immigration** violations in the cooperating **countries** and most were returned to their **country** of origin, **U.S.** officials said.

## **Classification**

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