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**FUGITIVE ARRAIGNED ON CHARGES OF SCAMMING IMMIGRANTS
OUT OF \$30,000 BY CLAIMING TO BE ABLE TO CUT GOVERNMENT "RED TAPE"**
Allegedly Posed as Federal Immigration Agent and U.N. Employee; Captured in Michigan

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that a man accused of defrauding three Queens immigrants of more than \$30,000 has been arraigned on charges of grand larceny and scheme to defraud. The defendant had purportedly fled to Michigan after seeing his photo on news reports detailing how he allegedly conned the immigrants out of the money by pretending to be able to help them expedite various matters – including getting a relative out of jail, assisting another person in obtaining a liquor license and claiming to be able to get a third individual a green card.

District Attorney Brown said, "The defendant is accused of unscrupulously exploiting individuals new to this country – and who were in need of assistance – to steal tens of thousands of dollars from them. If true, the defendant took advantage of his victims' desperation to line his pockets with their hard-earned cash and should be severely punished."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Pedro Guzman, 48, address unknown. Guzman was arraigned yesterday before Queens Criminal Court Judge William Harrington on two counts of third-degree grand larceny and one count each of fourth-degree grand larceny and first-degree scheme to defraud. Guzman, who faces up to seven years in prison if convicted, was ordered held on \$100,000 bail and to return to court on March 4, 2008.

Guzman was arrested earlier this month by New York Police Department detectives in Wayne County, Michigan, where he allegedly fled after seeing news reports with his photo and describing him as wanted in connection with this case.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the criminal complaint, Guzman posed as a United Nations employee with connections in the Queens District Attorney's Office and the New York City Department of Corrections after meeting a woman whose son had been arrested and was being held on Rikers Island. He also allegedly told her he knew a few judges. The woman, Karen Salazar, it is alleged, met Guzman at a shop located at 92nd Street and Ditmars Boulevard in March 2003, and he offered to help get her son out of jail, adding that he needed money to pay for court fees and other expenses. Guzman allegedly accepted \$8,000 from Salazar on July 18, 2003, and \$7,380

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from her on July 21, 2003. The defendant allegedly arranged to meet with Salazar on several occasions to get her son out of Rikers but always cancelled. He eventually stopped returning her phone calls, according to court papers.

Furthermore, according to the criminal complaint, on July 3, 2007, the defendant had a conversation with Luis Cepeda at his business at 107-11 Northern Boulevard in Queens and learned that Cepeda was trying to obtain a liquor license. It is alleged that Guzman presented himself as a federal agent – even displaying a gold badge – and offered to help expedite the process, claiming that he had “connections” because of his job. Guzman allegedly met with Cepeda several times between July 3, 2007, and October 2, 2007, and received approximately \$9,500 from him, saying the payments were necessary to expedite the process. He then requested and received an additional \$3,400.99 via a Western Union wire transfer, according to the charges. Guzman allegedly made several appointments to take Cepeda to visit his “connection,” but repeatedly cancelled and eventually stopped returning the victim’s phone calls.

Finally, the defendant is accused of telling Linda Pereira and her mother, Maria Zevallos, whom he also met at Cepeda’s place of business, that he was a federal agent employed by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency and that he could help expedite the process for Zevallos to obtain a United States residency card. He allegedly told her it would cost \$800, then said that for an additional \$1,520 he would be able to arrange for Zevallos’ interview to be conducted in Spanish. Pereira allegedly gave the defendant the money, totaling \$2,320, on August 26, 2007. Once again, he is accused of breaking repeated appointments with the victims to help them accomplish their goals, and eventually failing to return their phone calls.

The investigation was conducted by Detective Daniel Castillo of the NYPD’s 115th precinct detective squad, under the supervision of Lieutenant Richard Rudolph. Guzman was transported from Michigan to New York by Detective Castillo and Police Officer Michael Trance.

Assistant District Attorney Lauren Steele, of the District Attorney’s Economic and Environmental Crimes Bureau is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Christina Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief, and Gregory C. Pavlides, Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney of the Investigations Division Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

It should be noted that a complaint is merely an accusation and that the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editor: An e-version of this press release is posted on QDA website at www.queensda.org.