



# U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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**Statement**

**of**

**Kenneth Cates  
Associate Special Agent in Charge  
El Paso, Texas**

**Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
Department of Homeland Security**

**Before**

**House Government Reform Committee  
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human  
Resources**

**“Impact of the Drug Trade and Border Security”**

**June 29, 2004 at 1:00 p.m.  
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Kenneth Cates  
Associate Special Agent in Charge  
Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
Department of Homeland Security  
Special Agent in Charge  
El Paso, Texas**

Good morning, Chairman Souder and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I am honored to appear before you to discuss the “Impact of the Drug Trade on Border Security.” My name is Kenneth Cates, and I represent U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). ICE is charged with the mission of preventing terrorist and criminal activity by targeting the people, money, and materials that support terrorist and criminal organizations. One of our key goals within that larger mission is to detect and address vulnerabilities in our border security. These vulnerabilities include the threats posed by criminal organizations engaged in the smuggling of illegal narcotics and contraband across our nation’s borders.

ICE’s combined capabilities – bringing together the expertise and authorities of the former U.S. Customs Service and the former Immigration and Naturalization Service – make-it a powerful weapon in the fight against smuggling and narco-trafficking organizations. This expertise is further augmented by the assets and abilities of the ICE Air and Marine Operations. With these newly combined investigative authorities and expertise, ICE is uniquely positioned to address the threats posed by criminal smuggling organizations.

Consider, for example, ICE's creation of a unified smuggling division. Prior to our reorganization into DHS, enforcement authorities for drug and contraband smuggling and enforcement authorities for human smuggling were the exclusive province of separate agencies. Unfortunately, criminal smuggling organizations do not observe the same careful divisions of labor. Motivated by profit, they may smuggle narcotics one day and human "cargo" the next – shifting their tactics in response to demand, profit margins, and enforcement patterns. By combining these authorities and investigative expertise, we can now target these organizations much more effectively, whether they are trafficking in drugs, weapons, illegal aliens, or even terrorists.

Moreover, with its financial investigations capabilities, ICE is able to follow the money trails that support these criminal smuggling organizations. Under Cornerstone, our comprehensive economic security initiative, ICE has the ability to follow the money trails that support smuggling, criminal, and terrorist organizations. With Cornerstone, ICE brings to bear one of the most sophisticated financial investigations Divisions in law enforcement to detect these financial schemes, disrupt the flow of money, and dismantle these criminal organizations.

In coordination with our counterparts from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), we are utilizing these newly combined law enforcement capabilities as part of a focused and integrated strategy to combat the flow of illegal narcotics and contraband across our nation's borders – particularly here along the Southwest border.

For many years, the Southwest border region has been a preferred point of entry for many drug smuggling organizations, and as a result has been a major focus for drug interdiction. The ease with which narcotics can be smuggled into the United States underscores the seriousness of this vulnerability. The U.S. Southwest border stretches across 3,300 kilometers and boasts an extensive network of Ports of Entry (POEs) and border crossings, as well as a number of documented areas where unofficial crossings occur. Established routes, organizations, and methods used to smuggle one commodity – such as narcotics – could easily be exploited to smuggle others – such as people, bulk cash, small arms, contraband, or even weapons of mass destruction.

I would emphasize that these smuggling and narco-trafficking organizations are flexible and adaptive. When we increase seizures at one point, they frequently shift their operations elsewhere, where there is less perceived resistance from law enforcement. I will emphasize also these criminal smuggling organizations are often highly sophisticated. Along with their criminal experience, they have developed an acute knowledge and awareness of U.S. border security and enforcement operations, so that they can change their tactics in response to new enforcement patterns.

One particular area of concern is the increase of methamphetamine usage and investigations along the Southwest border. It is believed that due to the increased seizures and enforcement operations along the Northern Border, as well as pressure being placed by Canadian law enforcement on importation of pre-cursor chemicals, we may be seeing more methamphetamine smuggling

investigations along the Southwest United States. ICE investigators, working in cooperation with Federal, State, and local law enforcement, will continue to track trends and developments in the methamphetamine trade.

Despite the decrease in seizure numbers from Fiscal Year 2003 to 2004, we must not be complacent in believing that drug smuggling organizations will not continue to probe our nation's borders for easier methods and routes to smuggle narcotics into the United States. I can assure you that we will continue to carry out the mission of securing our Nation's borders and protecting our homeland from threats posed by criminal and terrorist organizations. In conclusion, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the Members of the Subcommittee for the privilege to testify before you today. It would be my pleasure to answer any questions that the committee may have at this time.