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Diplomatic Security Service “Operation Heartless” Dismantles Colombian Human Smuggling Network to the United States

DSS ARTICLES

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The Diplomatic Security Service and ICE Enforcement & Removal Operations arrested Johana Cuervo Castrillon in Houston, TX, for overstaying her visa in the United States and for conspiring with a Colombian-based human smuggling ring on April 29, 2025. (U.S. Department of State photo)

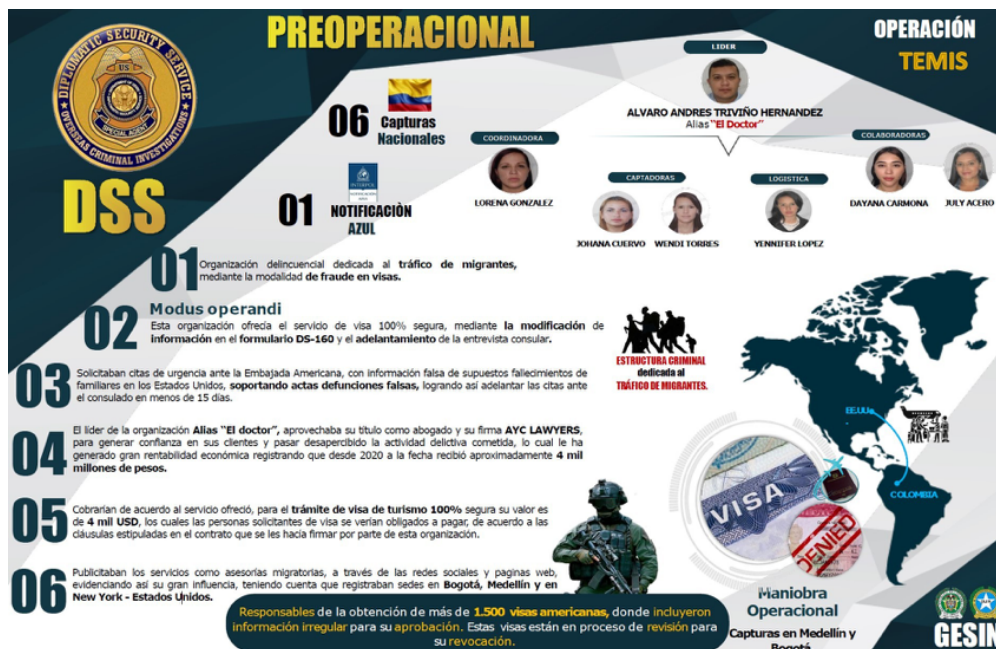
On April 29, 2025, special agents with the Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) Houston Field Office, with support from ICE Enforcement & Removal Operations, arrested Johana Cuervo Castrillon for overstaying her visa in the United States and conspiring with a Colombian-based human smuggling ring to exploit the U.S. travel system. Cuervo is the seventh and final suspect arrested in Operation Heartless, a multi-year international investigation led by DSS and coordinated with our Colombian National Police and Department of Homeland Security partners.

DSS special agents and criminal investigators at the U.S. Embassy in Bogota opened Operation Heartless in January 2024 with an investigation into Alvaro Andres Trivino Hernandez, who was suspected of coaching Colombian applicants for visa interviews and filling out their nonimmigrant visa applications online from his law offices in in Bogota and Medellin. DSS investigators noticed that a suspiciously high number of visa applicants used legitimate State of Florida death certificates to fraudulently claim they needed to attend funerals for deceased relatives in the United States. Funeral claims enable applicants to expedite visa interview appointments and be considered for travel to the United States.



DSS investigators followed the trail of the Florida death certificates and learned that Trivino conspired with Cuervo. The investigation uncovered that Trivino and Cuervo obtained legitimate State of Florida death certificates and provided them to visa applicants to submit to Embassy Bogota consular adjudicators to support false visa justification claims. Cuervo worked for a

With its global footprint, DSS is uniquely situated to leverage partnerships and coordinate with U.S., international, and foreign law enforcement to conduct transnational criminal investigations.



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