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U.S. INDICTS MARCO MORALES, SILVER SHOVEL FUGITIVE

CHICAGO – A former Chicago contractor who became a fugitive after he was sentenced in 1997 to nearly five years in prison for his role in the *Operation Silver Shovel* investigation of public corruption in Chicago was indicted today for allegedly selling approximately a kilogram of cocaine. The defendant, **Marco Morales**, who is believed to be living in Mexico, was charged in a superseding indictment returned by a federal grand jury, announced Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, and Robert D. Grant, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Morales, 61, was the first person charged in the Silver Shovel investigation, which became public in 1996 and revolved around bribes paid by an undercover cooperating defendant, John Christopher, to local government politicians.

In 1997, Morales pleaded guilty and agreed to cooperate with the Government in its investigation of local political corruption, but he became a fugitive when he failed to report to the Bureau of Prisons to serve a 59-month sentence for mail fraud and bribery. (*United States v. Morales*, 95 CR 742 N.D. Ill.)

Morales was arrested as a fugitive in 2004 by Mexican authorities at the request of the United States, but efforts to extradite him to Chicago were unsuccessful. The Government intends to ask Mexican authorities to extradite him to face today's cocaine distribution charge.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Terra Brown.

If convicted the drug charges carries a mandatory minimum penalty of five years in prison and a maximum of 40 years and a \$1 million fine. The Court, however, would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed.

The public is reminded that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the Government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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