

*ATF Agents Warned Congress They Lack Essential Legal Resources*

Washington, DC (Nov. 8, 2011) – Today, Attorney General Eric Holder called on Congress to provide the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) with the legal tools they need to fight firearms trafficking along the Southwest border. Attorney General Holder asked Congress to take up the requests made by ATF field agents who testified before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on June 15, 2011. During his testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee today, Attorney General Holder stated:

We are losing the battle to stop the flow of illegal guns to Mexico. That means we have a responsibility to act. And, we can start by listening to the agents who serve on the front lines of this battle. Not only did they bring the inappropriate and misguided tactics of Operation Fast and Furious to light, they also sounded the alarm to Congress that they need our help. ATF agents who testified before a House committee this summer explained that the agency's ability to stem the flow of guns from the United States into Mexico suffers from a lack of effective enforcement tools. One critical first step should be for Congressional leaders to work with us to provide ATF with the resources and statutory tools it needs to be effective.

Elijah Cummings (D-MD), Ranking Member of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, stated: "Attorney General Holder is exactly right. The same field agents who testified about the controversial tactics used by ATF also warned Congress that they need stronger law enforcement tools to combat the illegal flow of firearms to Mexico. It is hypocritical to act outraged when these agents highlight problems with Fast and Furious, but cover our ears when they plead for stronger laws to prosecute gun trafficking."

In June 2011, Cummings issued a report entitled ["OUTGUNNED: Law Enforcement Agents Warn Congress They Lack Adequate Tools to Counter Illegal Firearms Trafficking"](#). The report disclosed that ATF agents had told Congress as a part of its investigation of Operation Fast and Furious that they needed stronger sentences for straw purchasers, the ability to track multiple purchases of long-guns, and a dedicated firearms trafficking statute.

In response to law enforcement calls for greater enforcement tools to fight illegal firearms trafficking, Rep. Cummings and Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) introduced the "Stop Gun

Trafficking and Strengthen Law Enforcement Act.” The legislation establishes a dedicated firearms trafficking statute to empower law enforcement to keep high-powered firearms out of the hands of dangerous criminals, including Mexican drug cartels.

The legislation has been praised by the Mexican Ambassador to the United States, Arturo Sarukhan, and endorsed by several law enforcement organizations, including the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association (FLEOA), the largest professional police organization that represents over 26,000 federal agents and officers from 65 agencies in the United States Government, including the ATF. The legislation has also been endorsed by the Brady Campaign and the Violence Policy Center.

The former Acting Director of ATF, Ken Melson, told the Oversight Committee that law enforcement officials “absolutely” need a firearms trafficking statute to effectively attack these criminal trafficking rings. Chairman Darrell Issa vowed to oppose any anti-trafficking legislation requested by law enforcement.

In July, the Department of Justice established a mandatory reporting requirement for multiple long-gun sales and on November 1 the Sentencing Guidelines were changed to create stronger penalties for straw purchasers.